MISSION ON THE NILE

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by

JAMES DEMPSEY
of Mill Hill

For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, of our tribulation . . . that we were pressed . . . above our strength, so that we were weary even of life, but we had in ourselves the answer of death: that we should not trust in ourselves but in God.

II Cor. i. 8-9.

[p iii]
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29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

142
136
262
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By courtesy of V. Rev. J. P. Kennelly

Shilluk with baby crocodile
(delicacy esteemed by all Shilluk, Nuer and Dinka)

[facing p. iii]
[frontispiece]

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NIHIL OBSTAT: BERNARDVS TRAYNOR, M.A.
IMPRIMI POTEST: THOMAS MCLAUGHLIN, S.T.D.
SUPERIOR GENERALIS

NIHIL OBSTAT: DANIEL DVIVESTEIJN, S.T.D.
CENSOR DEPVTATVS
IMPRIMATVR: E. MORROGH BERNARD
VICARIVS GENERALIS
WESTMONASTERII: DIE VII MAII MCMLV

Made and printed in Great Britain by
William Clowes and Sons, Limited, London and Beccles for
Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd.
28 Ashley Place, London, S.W.1

First published 1955

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TO
THE REV. FATHER J. A. WALL,
FIRST PREFECT APOSTOLIC OF KODOK,
AND TO
THE PRIESTS AND BROTHERS OF MILL HILL
IN THE UPPER NILE PROVINCE
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
WITH AFFECTION AND RESPECT

Day Missions 9/7/56

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the Superior General of the Verona 127 Missionary Fathers for permission to use the material on which Chapter X is based, and to Sister Columba Ward for her translation of this material from the Italian original; to the Editor of *The Sudan Notes and Records*; and to Messrs. W. P. G. Thomson and P. P. Howell for much of the description of Chapter VI.

Use has also been made in various chapters, for information on and confirmation of the matter contained therein, of *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* by G. C. Seligman, *A Survey of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* by K. D. D. Henderson, *The Egyptian Sudan; Its Loss and Recovery* by Alford and Swords.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Very Rev. 000 F. Spakauskas, the Rev. J. Fitzsimons and the Rev. Mother G. Colognesi of the Malakal Prefecture, Upper Nile Province, and to the Very Rev. J. P. Kennelly of St Joseph's College, Freshford, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, who supplied the [127] photographs; to the Rev. W. Hallam of the Malakal Prefecture and the Rev. A. Foreman of St Josef's Missiehuis, Roosendaal, Holland, for their valued help and advice in the writing of the book; and to the Rev. B. J. Traynor, M.A., of Mill Hill, London, and Mr. Brian Carey of Burn Hall, Durham, for their assistance in preparing the manuscript for the press.

Catholic Mission, Lul,
Upper Nile Province,
Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

J. Dempsey

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CHAPTER I

WHERE IS KODOK?

I REMEMBER once reading a book, *Cavalcade* I think it was 797 called, the first chapter of which described the return 123 from the South African War of the Civic Imperial Volunteers. In it one of the victorious heroes was asked by his admiring wife, "Where is Africa, Alf?", but alas, Alf didn't know. My ignorance, I fear, was similar to that of Alf when in 1939 I received an appointment to work in the Apostolic Prefecture of Kodok. Almost all that I knew of Kodok was that it was in the Sudan, and therefore somewhere in Africa; to that extent, at least, my knowledge was superior to Alf's. I did know where Africa was, but apart from that the name Kodok was just a palindrome, for it was the last and least of our missions, having been entrusted to the care of the Mill Hill Fathers only in the previous year, and the first band of five priests with Monsignor J. A. Wall at their head had but recently taken possession of the new field.

It was in December, 1939, that four of us set out to augment the original band of five, sailing in a wartime convoy for Africa. By this time I had learned a little more about the place. I knew, for instance, that it was the same place as 797 Fashoda, famous in history as the meeting-place of Kitchener and Marchand and the scene of the 'incident' which nearly brought about war between France and England; that it was situated on the River Nile, 450 miles or so south of [131] Khartoum; that it gave its name to an Apostolic Prefecture which theoretically covered a territory more than twice the size of Ireland, but in practice was confined to the land of the tribes dwelling on the river banks; that in the Prefecture there were already four mission stations established at Detwok, Lul, Tonga and Yoynyang by the Verona Fathers, 797 our predecessors in the field; that really Kodok had very little to do with the Prefecture, being merely a village with a convenient name about ten miles from Detwok, from which it was administered.

000 The journey out provided few outstanding incidents to record. The blowing up of a trawler which struck a magnetic mine in the English Channel; the sight of the destroyers keeping station on the flanks of the convoy and the daily visit of Coastal Command aircraft; the halt under the great guns of Gibraltar, where the convoy dispersed; the loveliness of Valetta in Malta, and its great heat; the Midnight Mass at Christmas celebrated deep down inside the ship for the benefit of the Goanese stewards, and the indescribable discord of their singing; the surprising coldness of the Suez Canal at night; our feeling of forlornness when at last we stood on the quay at Port Sudan and watched the ship steaming out of the harbour; our dismay when we realized that our baggage had not been landed from the hold and was being carried on to Mombasa; these are the simple recollections that remain of an uneventful voyage. From Port Sudan we travelled by rail 500 miles through the desert to Khartoum. At each station along the route there was a lengthy halt while hordes of Sudanese, men, women and children, clamoured around the carriage windows, some offering for sale scraggy-looking chickens and doubtfully fresh eggs, others merely holding out grimy hands for alms and chanting the familiar Sudanese cry, 'Baksheesh, baksheesh'. At Atbara a lone Italian priest met the train, a Verona Father, one who keeps the Sanctuary lamp alight in the desert. He is always informed from Port Sudan or from Khartoum when a priest is passing through so that he can have an opportunity of making his confession. On this occasion, however, he was bidding farewell to one of his brethren from Khartoum whose company he had enjoyed for a few days and who now joined us on the train on his way home. In Khartoum we stayed for a short while as guests with the Verona Fathers and then set out on the last lap of our travels, the 500-mile journey up the Nile.

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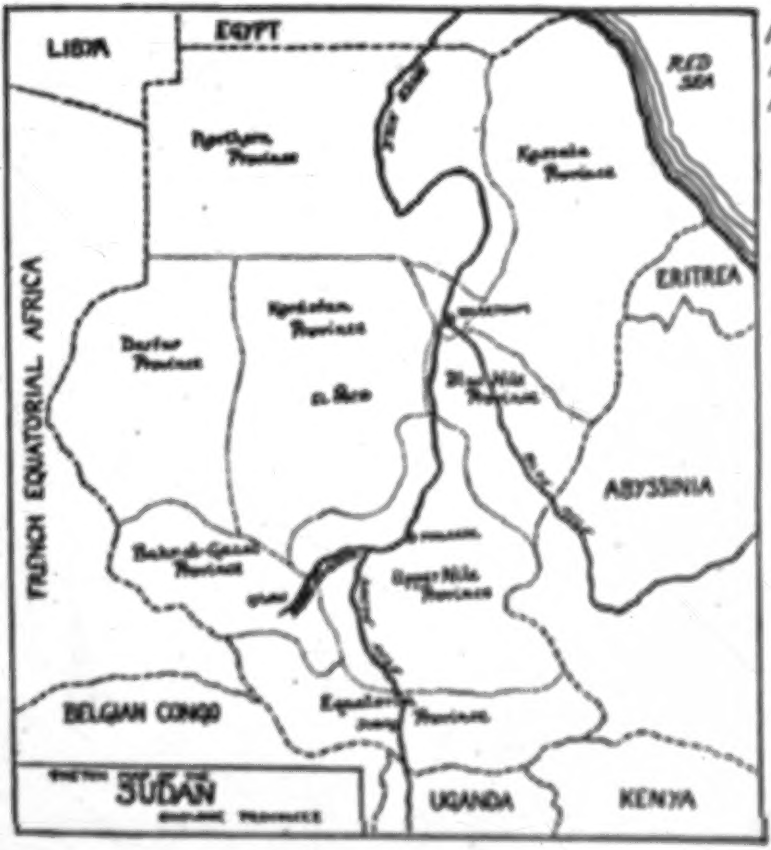
LIBYA
EGYPT
RED SEA
Northern Province
Kassala Province
ERITREA
FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA
Darfur Province
Kordofan Province
El Obeid
Blue Nile Province
ABYSSINIA
Bahr-el-Ghazal Province
Upper Nile Province
Equatoria Province
BELGIAN CONGO
UGANDA
KENYA
SUDAN

This was made on the paddle steamer which wanders along the river between Khartoum in the north and Juba in the south, accepting and delivering mail and cargo at the trading posts and mission stations established on the Nile banks. The good ship *Rejaf* was more of a convoy than a single vessel, for she pushed and pulled along with her seven barges for passengers and cargo. First-class passengers were accommodated on the steamer itself; intermediate second-class passengers were carried on a house-boat-like barge alongside; in front went three barges conveying

000 second- and third-class passengers and cargo, and around and behind were more cargo barges. Thus burdened, the *Rejaf*, travelling by night as well as by day, plodded along the river at a steady five miles an hour. A blast from its steam whistle signalled our approach to a trading station, and immediately all was bustle and excitement on the river bank. Merchants from the interior were there in force bringing in trucks, or loaded on camels and donkeys, quantities of produce for shipment, mostly grain. Humbler folk were there too, carrying the inevitable chickens and eggs, or perhaps dragging a protesting sheep or goat for sale to the crew. The whole bank was a mass of vociferous hagglers and squalling children, and if it were daytime, the water's edge would be lined with women washing clothes, the owners of which would be taking a dip in the river the while. Thanks to the hot sun and the stiff breeze this whole process of washing and drying takes less than ten minutes, which is an improvement on any patent soap-powder method, though it would be untrue to say that the clothes come out with the same dazzling whiteness. A few hundred yards from the river could be seen the village with its mosque built of sun-dried brick and its *suq* or market-place where one might find exposed for sale everything from dried dates to electric torches, and from soap (for which few seem to have much use) to murderous-looking swords and daggers. However, after an hour or so, all business completed, the steamer would back out into midstream, and the beat of its paddles soon lull us again to sleep as we lay in our deckchairs.

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123 By the end of the third day we began to look around us with a quickened interest, for we had entered the Upper Nile Province which to us was synonymous with the Apostolic Prefecture of Kodok. We already knew our destinations, for we had found letters awaiting us in Khartoum appointing three of us to stations in the territory of the Shilluk tribe and the fourth to Yoynyang on the Bahr-el-Gazal (Gazelle River) among the wild and woolly Nuer. I was destined for Detwok, and so the small hours of the next morning found me packed and ready for departure, since I

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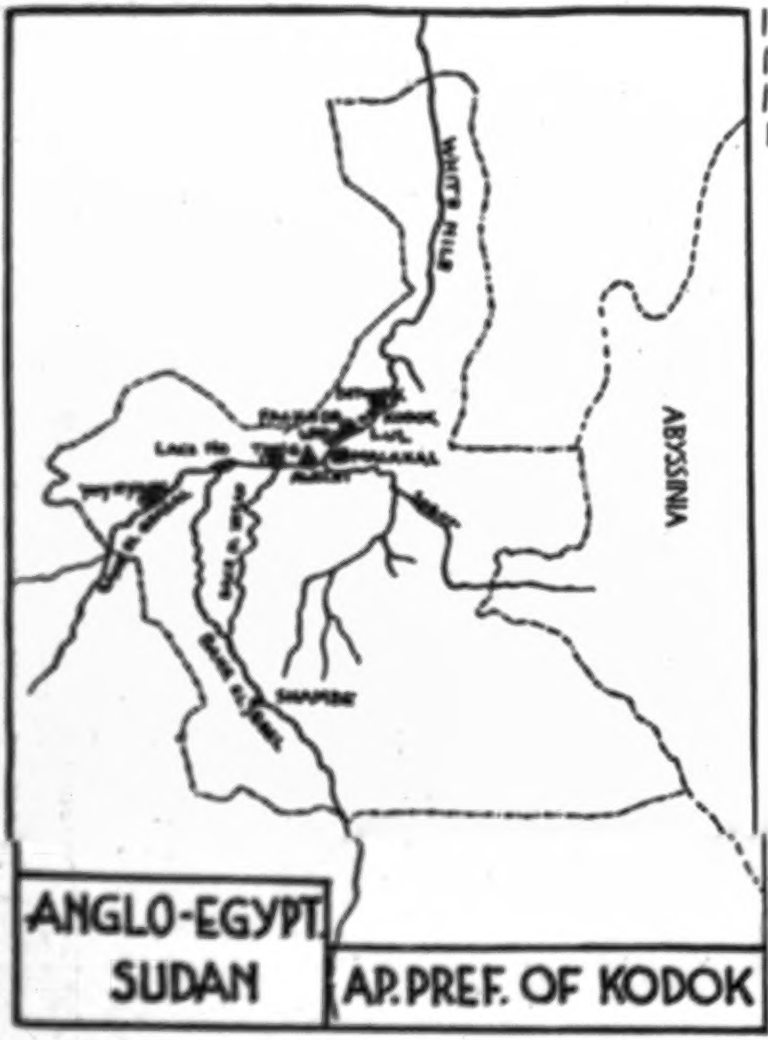

WHITE NILE
ABYSSINIA
LAKE No
ANGLO-EGYPT SUDAN
AP. PREF. OF KODOK

had been warned that the boat would arrive at Detwok about 3 a.m. At last I heard the raucous hoot which was so often to rouse me from my beauty sleep during the coming years; I bade a quick farewell to the other Fathers who had 797 123

797 come on deck to see me leave, and together with my luggage
123 I was bundled into the steamer's boat, rowed to the bank, carried through the deep mud on the shoulders of the boatman, and finally dumped on solid ground. Here I found Monsignor Wall who, after visiting Detwok, was returning to his headquarters at Malakal, and the Superior of the Mission. Monsignor had just time for a word of welcome be-
123 fore he was carried to the boat I had just left and rowed across to the steamer standing out in midstream. The Superior and I turned, and by the dim light of a hurricane lamp made our way through the dark tunnel which led to the house. It was a ramp, half a mile long, built over the swamp and bordered with trees; at every yard I shied fearfully at writhing shapes across the path, only to gulp with relief on finding that they were not the snakes I expected but the roots of the trees. In the end there loomed up before us the shadowy bulk of the house that was to be my home for the next ten years. I had arrived.

Chapter II

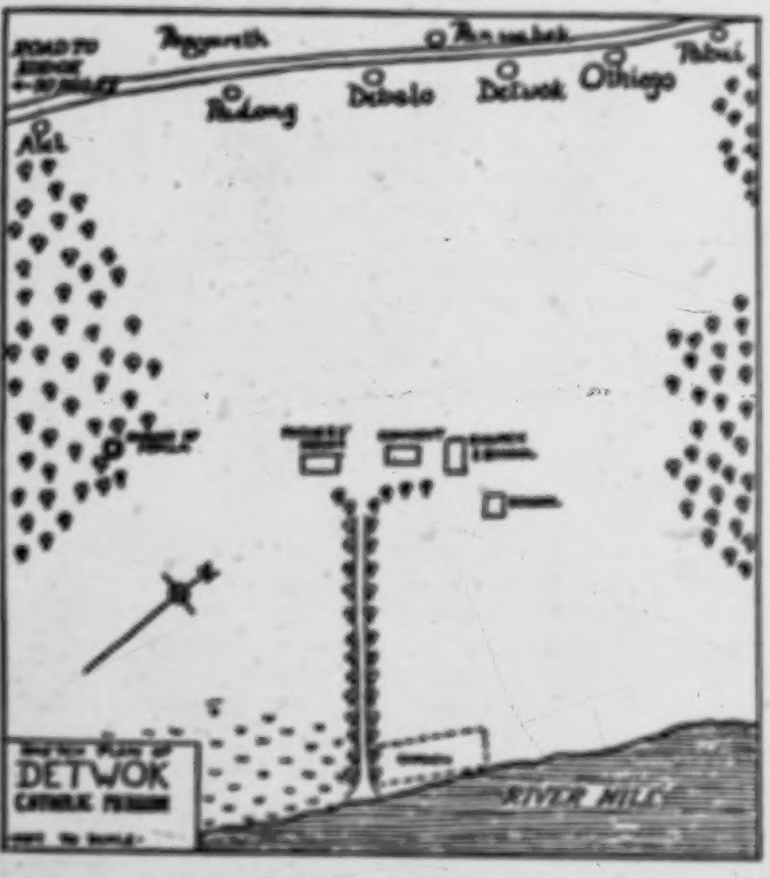
THE PROMISED LAND

797 I awoke refreshed from sleep, and in the bright morning sunshine I was able to survey my new dwelling place. It was no Eden. In Africa there are many places of wonderful natural beauty, but Detwok is not one of them. Right in front of the house stood the ignoble remains of a brick kiln, and that together with the dried-up appearance of the soil gave one the impression of standing in a well-burnt brickfield. One looked ahead over an expanse of baked earth scarcely relieved by tufts of grass, yellow and shrivelled by the heat, and low clumps of thorn bushes and saw the river shining in the distance. To right and left of the house, indeed almost surrounding the compound in the rear, was a forest of vicious-looking thorn bush beyond which, half a mile away, could be seen the Shilluk villages thinly strung [361] out in line, like, as one writer has put it, 'beads on a string'. In the compound itself were the Fathers' house, a substantial building just recently completed by the Italian Fathers with bricks burnt in the kiln whose ruins still remained, the Convent of the Sisters and a two-storey building with a school below and chapel above.

134 The scene was unlovely in the extreme. The earth of all that portion of the Upper Nile Province apart from the swamps is cotton soil, which, though eminently suitable for the growing of cotton, is useful for little else. In the dry [132] season, lasting from November to June, its surface is rough and hard, broken by large cracks into which a bicycle wheel can easily slip as far as the hub; in the time of the rains it soon becomes a mass of grey viscous mud as unsafe for a careless walker as the surface of an ice rink. After a few weeks of heavy rain most of the countryside turns into a vast swamp through which one must wade knee-deep in water,

134 struggling at each step to free oneself from the clinging mud
underneath. Long after the rains have ceased the swamp
remains, only drying up gradually under the heat of the sun
and through drainage into the river, until by mid-December
the moisture has all been drawn from the earth, and the bright
green grass which has covered it during the rains begins to
turn yellow and wither.

797 If my new home was no Eden of beauty, neither was it one
free from labour and toil. The territory covered by the
mission is, I discovered, quite large. In length it is about 70
miles, extending from Kaka, 55 miles to the north, to a
point 15 miles south of Detwok; inland it stretches 15 miles
[361] from the river where the Shilluk villages farthest from the
river are to be found. The 'parish' thus comprises roughly
an area of 1,050 square miles and it is a formidable task for
two priests to administer it, especially as the most speedy
[493] means of transport available is the push bicycle. However,
[771] most of the Christians, who at that time were by no means
numerous, lived in the villages near the mission, and large
areas were without habitation of any kind, so that the task
of parochial visitation did not prove as onerous as it might
at first appear. The Shilluk are inveterate wanderers and
[166] often drift from the villages in which they were born and
baptized as far north as Kaka, or inland to the limits of
inhabited country. There they will remain for years quite
out of touch with the mission and Christian influence, for
rarely if ever do they come in to hear Mass and receive the
Sacraments. With all the good will in the world it is impossible for two priests, one with the many affairs of the
mission to attend to and the other fully occupied in the
school, to keep track of these nomads and follow them in their
763 wanderings. But their heavenly mother, Mary, does not forget them at the hour of their death, and many is the time that
797 a message from a vigilant catechist, or word brought casually
by a passing traveller, or, more often than not, a request for
a burial cloth from the pagan relatives of the dying Christian
sends the priest post-haste a journey of 15 or 20 miles, in
the dry season by bicycle, in the rains on foot, to bring the



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last consolations of religion to these poor brethren of 997
Christ. 763

After a month or so of my stay in Detwok I was happily 997
settled in my new home, and was beginning to find my way 123
about both in the district and—what was more difficult—in the Shilluk tongue. Although my activities were mainly confined to the classroom, occasionally I was able to escape from the trammels of schoolwork and spend a morning touring round some part of the mission. A morning of visiting

797 123 would proceed somewhat in this fashion. I would plan an itinerary to take in half-a-dozen villages covering an area of two square miles or so, and from the mission books or my own notes decide on what had to be done. Augustine, living in Detwok, for example, had not sent in his pagan wife for instruction as he had promised; another gentle prodding would be necessary there. In Debalo I might find Julian, and it would be as well to investigate the report that he had begun negotiations for marriage with a pagan girl; I must find out how far matters have gone and how many head of cattle have been paid, and warn him to send the girl into the mission in good time so that she might be instructed and baptized and the marriage celebrated in church. Thomas in Pabiu has inherited his brother's wife, so I had better look him up and find out what he intends to do about it. And while I am there I shall make a point of calling to see old Rachael, a good woman who has been ill for a long time now; she has already received the last Sacraments and is waiting for our Lord to call her from this weary world, weary [164] indeed for her for she is a leper and blind as well; a few cheerful words and the gift of a screw of tobacco will help to relieve the tedium of a long day. In Othicongo there is another sick woman whom I ought to visit; the Sisters have been taking care of her and instructing her, as she is a pagan; perhaps it might be prudent now to baptize her. Also there is that young villain Paul who ran away from school last week; his father must be persuaded to send him back again. And that reminds me that in the next village lives Frederick, who assured the Superior that he would send his children to school, but has not done so; he must be given a sharp reminder of the duties of Christian parents towards their children. My list of calls thus planned, I pack my sick-[249] call case into the cycle bag, break off a few pieces of native [276] grown tobacco from a lump like a brick, and just as hard and appetising looking, and stuff them into my pocket, mount my cycle and bump off across country towards the main road and the line of villages.

My entrance to the first village is greeted by a cacophony

of frenzied barking, as all the mongrels in the place, suddenly 797
galvanized into life at the appearance of a stranger, give 123
tongue to their displeasure and make a concerted rush with
the evident intention of tearing me to pieces. I shout to one
or two youths loitering near and ask them to call off the
dogs, but to no avail, so I seize a stick and get in a telling
smack or two on some which have ventured too near, and
disperse the rest with a few well-aimed lumps of cotton soil.
They retreat to a safe distance barking and growling threa- 123
teningly, but at least I can make my way into the village in 797
peace. There is little astir; a few men squat near the cow 512
byre gossiping while one lies prostrate on the ground with [302]
the village hairdresser anointing his hair with a mixture of [305]
red mud, oil and ashes as a preparation for building it up
into an elaborate coiffure. Most of the women have not yet
returned from their daily trudge to the river for water, but
the spirals of smoke rising from behind the reed fences which
surround the individual homesteads indicate that some of
the more industrious housewives have already begun to
prepare the morning meal. A group of small children, pot- 797
bellied and large-eyed, soon run to surround the Father and 123
his bicycle; gravely they scrutinize him and his mount [142]
while some shyly offer him the customary Shilluk greeting, [576]
'*Yi bi*—You have come'. The bolder spirits among them
venture to come closer to investigate the wonder of his
wrist watch, putting their ears against it to hear its ticking
with smiles of amazement and delight.

The children follow the priest as he wheels his cycle across
the open space to where the knot of idlers is sitting near [622]
the cattle byre. The village chief who is among them rises [576]
courteously to greet the white man; '*Jal dwong*,' he says, '*Yi
nin*: Great one, you have slept.' I answer him in accustomed
fashion, '*Yi nut*: You are here,' and then each man of the
group greets me separately and receives his answer. I seat [554]
myself in the place of honour on the chief's mat and smoke a
cigarette with him, discussing the prospects of the crops and
making enquiries about certain ones in whom I am in-
terested. Soon I excuse myself and go off in search of my

797 123 errant sheep, Augustine, who has taken to himself a wife who is a pagan. Augustine is not be found anywhere; no one knows when he went away, where he is, or when he is likely to return. I think it very probable that he saw me coming, and at present is hiding in a neighbouring hut, but I know that it is useless to press the matter further now, so making a mental note to come back after a day or two, I retrieve my cycle with a sigh and, waving farewell to the chief, make my way to the next village on my list. Here, my welcome from the dogs is as noisy as ever, but my visit more successful. Julian is at home and admits that he has begun to pay cattle for the lady of his choice, yet asserts loudly and with an air of injured innocence that he would not dream of marrying outside the Church, and that he has only to point out to the girl the error of her pagan ways for her to begin instruction in the mission. This I take with a grain of salt, for I have heard it all before and know from experience that it will take months of patient and persevering persuasion before the bride-to-be presents herself to the Sisters to commence the learning of the Catechism. Still I must be satisfied with Julian's assurance, and taking leave of him I pop in to see Rachael.

The poor old lady is lying on a skin on the ground, her emaciated body covered with a dirty cloth. She seems to be dead already, but at the sound of the priest's voice she stirs slightly and turns her sightless eyes in my direction. I can see that she has grown much weaker since last I saw her, and that it can only be a matter of days till she goes to her reward, so I give her another blessing for the good of her soul and close her skinny claws round a piece of tobacco. Poor Rachael is too far gone to use or appreciate such a luxury, but she realises that some one has given her something and is comforted by the possession of it. She tucks her gift away among her rags, for she knows that if her harridan of a daughter sees it she will take it from her as soon as her visitor has departed.

The round of visits continues. Paul's father is surprised to learn that his truant son has not been in school for the past week; he certainly has not been home, he says, and surmises that he has run off to the cattle camp across the river; he promises to investigate the matter in the morning, and the look in his eyes bodes no good for his errant offspring. In the case of the other missing schoolchildren I do not have the same success; Frederick is not at home, nor his boy; Cecilia, his wife, says that the lad is minding the sheep and goats and implies that he will have to go on minding them as there is no one else to do it. (The flock actually minds itself to the ruin of the Sisters' garden, while the false shepherd disports himself in the river.) As to little Amelia, she is wanted at home to look after the baby, so she can't come to school either. I give this up as a bad job and push on to work through the remainder of my visits. Once or twice I am called into a hut to look at someone who is sick, and if I judge that he or she is sufficiently ill to warrant the attention of the Sisters, I make a note of the name and place. In one hut I find a tiny baby obviously very ill, so while the mother anxiously looks on, I baptize it, giving it the name Angela. (I learned that evening from the Sisters that little Angela had died, and I felt happy that I had been instrumental in speeding her flight to join the angel choirs above.)

But now the last of the calls is made, and, accompanied by the ever unfriendly dogs, I make my exit from the village and take the track leading to the main road. In the distance I hear the mission bell ringing out the mid-day Angelus, and saluting the Mother of God as I ride, I quicken my speed towards the mission house and lunch.

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR ORIGIN

101 THE reader will by this be anxious to know something of
the people who inhabit this promised land, the people
whom up to this I have spoken of as the Shilluk. That is the
name by which they are known as a tribe both among them-
selves and by others. At present the tribe numbers about
[161] 120,000.

142 The Shilluk are for the most part tall and lean in appear-
ance, taller in general than the average, though the mean
height of six feet attributed to them by some writers is some-
thing of an exaggeration. In features and colour they vary
very much, ranging from the squat, ebony-black face with
beetling brows, flat broad nose and thick lips to the long-
headed aristocratic type, light in colour, with high cheek
bones, long straight nose and thin lips. An almost universal
304 custom among them is to tattoo the brows so that the flesh is
raised to form, as it were, a row of beads running from
temple to temple. This practice of cicatrization often finds
expression too in the pricking out on back, breast or arms
[532] of elaborate designs in the shape of a scorpion, a fish or a
lemon. The custom of knocking out the lower incisor teeth
of children is still frequently practised, often, strangely
enough, at the wish of the child himself, or herself, for girls
also submit to the ordeal. At one time it seems to have been
[856] obligatory for the children of commoners, but it is no longer
so. The teeth are extracted when the child is about eleven or
twelve years old, and many a pleasant-looking face is spoiled
by this crude dentistry. Most native Africans have beauti-
[142] fully white teeth, and it seems a pity that a child should be
thus mutilated, and that a beaming smile instead of reveal-
ing two rows of lovely teeth should expose an ugly gap in the
lower jaw.

For dress both sexes wear a length of cotton cloth knotted 291 on one shoulder, the left of a man, and the right of a woman, and falling to the knees. These cloths when new are a dazzling white, but they soon lose all semblance of their original purity. The male Shilluk favours red, and steeps his [316] cloth in a dye made from brick dust which produces a russet hue; the female, alas, prefers to soak her cloth in oil which turns her lovely white robe into a dingy, evil smelling clout.

'In the Spring,' sings the poet, 'a young man's fancy 832 lightly turns to thoughts of love,' and this is no less true of 302 the Shilluk youth than it is of his brother of any other race or clime. A Shilluk gallant seeking to captivate a maiden's heart is indeed a sight to see; his cloth is dyed the deepest red; his spear-blade glitters and its six-foot shaft is smooth and polished; his face is painted red and white (and in other colours, too, if he has a friend or relation who has access to the school chalk-box), with the beads of flesh across his brow pricked out in contrasting colours; he is loaded down with [301] ropes of beads, dangling ear-rings, bracelets and anklets, so that he clanks along like a tank engine. But the most astonishing feature of his get-up is his hair. No fashionable hairdresser at home can teach the Shilluk anything about hair-styles. Nature has given him but a sparse thatch of thin, kinky hair, yet with this he produces the most amazing results. If he decides to go in for the soup-plate style, he waits until his hair has grown to a reasonable length and then puts himself in the hands of the local hairdresser who treats his locks with a mixture of mud, oil, ashes and other less pleasing ingredients before moulding them into discs on each side of the head, teasing the hair into minute curls. Sometimes the barber will shave the top of the head bare, but occasionally he will treat it with red mud and knead it into small balls like cherries, or shape it like a cock's comb or something equally fantastic. A youth who adopts this hair-style may keep it long after his courting days are over and he has settled down as a sedate husband, and in this case the two side discs, reinforced from time to time with extra supplies

832 of mud, assume enormous proportions, becoming rather like
302 the wide ears of an elephant. When they become too cumbersome he tires of them and has them cut off; he may then
adopt another style, but as a rule the fires of youth have by
this died down and he is content to leave his hair in its
natural state.

302 Other highly esteemed hair-styles are the 'Cherry Pie', when the hair all over the head is moulded tightly into little red balls; the 'Cock's Comb' extending in a raised ridge from the crown of the head to the forehead while the rest is shaven, and the 'Hat Brush'. One day my houseboy appeared before my startled eyes with his head clean shaven save for a long elliptical patch of hair which he had dyed (with, I suspected, the Sisters' laundry blue) a brilliant blue colour. Again, a brave will sometimes scorn all such fripperies, and shave his head completely, polish it with oil and bind a string of flat blue beads around his forehead, achieving the effect of a decorated chocolate Easter egg.

562 As is usual in the East it is the male who wears the fine
plumage while the female is subdued, if not indeed drab, in
her colouring. A Shilluk girl makes no attempt to imitate
the gorgeous decoration of her brother; her dirty grey cloth
[291] she may hem with an embroidered pattern in beads, and she
[591] may bedeck also with coloured beads the little apron she
wears around her waist, but apart from a string of beads
[301] around her neck or arm and an iron or copper bangle, that
is the only finery she will allow herself. She rarely paints
[302] her face or dresses her hair. On the occasion of a dance
[292] she will change her everyday cloth for a blue one or a mantle
of deer skin, anoint her shaven head with oil and trick
herself out with a few more beads, and having gone as far
as fashion allows will rely upon personal charm to win her
admirers.

174 The origins of the Shilluk people are not known with any
[177] degree of certainty. It would seem from their affinity,
especially in language, with the Jur tribe of the Southern
Sudan and with the Luo of the Bahr-el-Gazal and Kenya

that they once formed part of a great tribe which had its 174 home in the district north-east of the Great Lakes of Uganda. [197] This theory is supported by their tribal lore which says that long ago (the time is computed to be about the second half 173 of the sixteenth century) their people came from far away, 174 a locality indicated by a vague wave of the arm in the general direction of Uganda, and moved up into the Sudan. They did not take the direct line of the Nile as their route because of the vast swamps which lie between the southernmost part of the Sudan and the present Shilluk country, but turned north-west and made their first settlement in the region now known as the Bahr-el-Gazal. Of their leaders two are especially remembered: Nyikang and his nephew, Dimo. Nyikang seems to have been a mild and peace-loving gentleman, and Dimo truculent and quarrelsome. Tired of constant bickering, Nyikang gathered a few followers and, leaving Dimo in undisputed possession of the territory they then had, he followed the course of the Bahr-el-Gazal until, having left the great swamps behind him, he moved into the region of the present Shilluk country. He little thought that in leaving the fertile land of the Bahr-el-Gazal to seek peace for himself and his followers, he was not leading them into that plenty which is so often the handmaid of peace, but was condemning them and their descendants to hardship and want, to disease and hunger. Yet that is what happened. Weary of being constantly halted by the swamps, he seized upon the first sizeable stretch of country north of the swamp area, and there the migration came to rest. Tradition says that when he arrived at the entrance to this Promised Land, Nyikang lay down gratefully in the shade of a tree and uttered a fervent thanks to God; this incident has given its [103] name to a village founded on that historic spot; Papwojo, the Village of Thanksgiving.

The travellers soon found that their new home was no land flowing with milk and honey; it was hard and inhospitable, scorched in the dry season and flooded in the wet, scarcely able to provide a living for man and beast, yet with it they had to be content, for farther progress was barred to them.

173 To the west and north was the desert inhabited by peoples
174 greater and stronger than themselves and prepared to dispute their advance in that direction; on the east the Nile ran, and behind them were the swamplands, and Dimo.
131 They had no choice then but to stay in the country where
361 they are found today, a narrow belt of land extending from Tonga in the south to Kaka in the north, a distance of about 150 miles. Inland Shilluk settlements may be found 15 miles away from the river, but generally their villages, containing from two to twenty or thirty families, stand no further than a mile or two from its banks, straggling along the whole length of the country. Since their first settling there some hardy souls have crossed the Nile and found a foothold on its eastern bank which they have gradually extended until they occupy a strip of land stretching from opposite Kodok in the north to the River Sobat in the south, and along that river for a distance of 30 miles or so. The nature of the country on the other side, however, does not differ from that of their original settlement, and the powerful Dinka tribe has always opposed their progress inland, so that those who have gone to live on the eastern bank are no better off than they were before.

565 The social structure of the Shilluk tribe is built up from a division of the people into four classes or castes. These classes are not however exclusive, for they live together in the same villages, share common tasks and recreations and even intermarry. The basis of the division is the possession of royal blood, or, ultimately, descent from Nyikang.

565 The first class is that of the Kwareth, the Royal Clan. To
644 this belong all those who are members of the royal houses tracing their ancestry directly to Nyikang. Only a member of this class is eligible for election as king. The first four generations of a king's descendants are recognized as being of royal blood and are entitled to the privileges of royalty.
[304] Thus they are permitted to retain all their teeth, they may
[301] wear an anklet of small white beads, and more than one according to the nearness of descent; they alone may dress
[292] in a leopard skin for a dance.

in a leopard skin for a dance. Apart from these privileges, 565
however, the son or grandson of a king is in no other way 644
distinguished; he must undertake the menial tasks which fall to [857]
the lot of the boys of the village, the herding of the cows and sheep, the milking and the cleaning of the byre; he submits to the same ordeal of tattooing and cannot anticipate his initiation dance, the great coming-of-age celebration, by which he and others of his age-group formally become full members of the tribe. He is accorded a special respect, and if he is a Nyireth, a son of the king, is eligible for election to the high office of king of his people. The fifth generation of the king's descendants, though they are allowed to retain the title of Kwanyireth, descendants of the king, merge into the common people and are treated as such.

The second class is that of the Ororo, which holds a 565
peculiar position in the social system. Its members are of 173
royal blood, but are for ever debarred from election to the kingship. Shilluk history relates that of the fifth king, Ocalo, all the sons of his first wife were slain in battle with the Nuer, save one. This was a puny boy whom his father despised as unfit to be king. In his grief and rage at the loss of his sons, Ocalo threw the sacred spears of Nyikang into the river to signify that he considered his house at an end, since he had now no son worthy of succeeding him. The son who was left, Duad by name, upbraided his father fiercely, and swore that if ever he became king he would disinherit and degrade the other children of Ocalo. Eventually he did become king, and kept to his oath. His half-brothers were all degraded to the level of commoners, but because of their undoubted royal ancestry they formed a special clan among the other royal clans. To compensate them for the loss of their rank they were given, and still hold, special functions at the installation and burial ceremonies of the king. They
used also to hold the office of royal executioners and put to [693]
death all those who fell under the king's displeasure, but in [687]
these more enlightened times, that office is no longer required.

The third class is that of the Colo. Strictly speaking this 565
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The Consecration

Note the fashions in hair-dressing. The soup-plate style is achieved by letting the hair grow long and stiffening it with clay

By courtesy of V. Rev. J. P. Kennedy

The Communion

Note the hair-style affected by the chap nearest the camera: little balls of red clay give this charming effect

Detwok Mission: Mass at Détwok village (Celebrant, Rev. Fr. Rowlands)

[facing p. 20]

565 term applies only to the descendants of the original companions
563 of Nyikang, but in practice it embraces the whole of the common people and includes those who were probably in possession of the land before the coming of the Shilluk and who were conquered and absorbed into the tribe, and individuals of other tribes who, whatever their origin, have come into the country and settled there, eventually merging with the people.

565 The last class is that of the Bang Reth, the servants of the
644 king. This group is made up of the king's personal attendants,
[567] his wives and the wives of former kings, and the descendants of former royal slaves. It includes also those who have taken up special service with the king because of their reverence for his sacred office as Vicar of Nyikang, those who by reason of their utter destitution have been driven to accept the yoke of bondage to the king that they might share the bounty of the royal table, and those who
[567] have been enslaved on account of a crime committed by some member of their family who himself has escaped the
[681] king's justice.

565 Marriage is permitted between the Kwareth and members
582 of the other three classes with certain exceptions. Thus, for example, a Kwareth may marry into the Bareth, but he may not wed the former wife of a king, or the widow of a king. The daughters of a king may not marry at all; since in theory all the cattle in the land belong to the king, no one can offer him a dowry, and so his daughters must go unmarried. In
644 marriage the great rule of exogamy, that is marriage outside
565 the clan, must be observed. Now the Kwareth form only one
582 clan, as also do the Ororo, but the Colo and the Bang Reth are divided into several clans. A member of the Kwareth clan may not therefore marry another Kwareth, or a member of the Ororo another of the same clan, but members of the Colo and the Bareth may marry into other clans of the Colo and Bareth.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

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Easter egg

Cherry pie

Soup-plate, profile

Soup-plate, front view

Photo: Dr. P. [illegible]

Shilluk hair-styles

[facing p. 21]

Chapter IV

SHILLUK LIFE

THE Shilluk country is for the most part flat, low-lying /33
grass-land. The river by constant pressure frequently
breaks through its containing banks and, sweeping away
the soft soil, inundates the land lying behind them. Since
nothing is done to repair the broken banks, these inundations
increase each year as with the rise of the Nile
the waters creep ever further inland, receding only slowly
with the fall of the flood waters. As a consequence of this, 361
Shilluk villages are usually built well back from the river,
at least half a mile from the highest point of the flood.
Usually, too, they are built along the main road passing [491]
from Kaka to Tonga. In some areas, particularly in the
Detwok-Kodok locality, villages can be found several miles
inland, even up to as much as fourteen miles. In such places 312
the people depend for their water supplies on the scum-covered
water holes dug here and there. Naturally, under
conditions like this personal hygiene is somewhat at a discount,
and social or parochial calls present their own
problems. During the dry season the Nile is the only source
of water for most villages, even those situated miles away
from the river. At Detwok, for instance, it is a common [512]
sight to see the women of Aguno trudging past the mission
at six o'clock in the morning, having already walked five
miles. In half an hour or so they will be on their way back [482]
balancing their full water-pots on their heads. They cannot
reach their homes again before nine o'clock when they will [512]
have to set to work to grind millet and prepare the morning
meal. If they are careful with the water it may last for two
days, but then they will have to pick up the large earthenware
pots and take the hated road to the Nile more than
five miles off. Once when I happened to be passing through [281]

812 Aguno I stopped to watch a couple of men stretching and
[281] scraping a cow hide. One of them called to a girl in the
village, his wife or sister, to bring him some water to soften
the skin. With great reluctance she brought a large bowlful
and stood by, while with lavish hand the man splashed the
precious water on skin and ground indiscriminately. He then
demanded more and I thought, and hoped, that she would
refuse; that she would remind him that she had walked
eleven burning miles to bring the water that he threw away so
thoughtlessly. After a moment's hesitation, however, she
picked up the bowl he had thrown at her feet and turned
slowly towards the hut, but as she did so I saw two tears over-
flow from her brimming eyes and roll down her cheeks. Such
[522] drudgery is forced on these womenfolk by circumstance and
custom, and we can only wish that things were in some way
bettered.

361 But now let us proceed and see what a Shilluk village is
like. We enter it along a little path which leads from the
[487] main road and passes through the dried up, yellow stubble
of last season's millet plantation.

Passing through the space between the fences of two
[367] neighbouring homesteads, we come upon a large level
circle of bare ground which is the playground of the village
[535] and its dancing floor. Sometimes it boasts a tree, green and
leafy in contrast to its dun, dusty surroundings, under the
refreshing shade of which the village elders gather to discuss
[521] the affairs of their little world: the price of cattle, the failure
of the harvest, the prospect of the fishing. Under the tree, too,
or at the further side of the dancing floor, are two large
[534] forked stakes driven into the ground to hold the drums.
Around this circular central space the family dwellings are
grouped.

[621] Villages vary in size, from the small hamlet consisting of
two or three homesteads to a large settlement of sixty or
seventy. An average-sized village contains about thirty
families. All, however, are set up on the same plan, and the
houses are built according to the same pattern. Each house-
351 hold consists of two houses set facing one another in a small

enclosure surrounded by a reed fence which overlaps on the 351
side facing the central space, leaving a narrow entrance about
two feet long. This is so narrow that one has to turn sideways
to get through it. The narrowness of this passage and the
smallness of the doorway of each house are a means of
defence against possible aggressors. No intruder could rush
into the small compound and take those inside by surprise.
As an additional protection the passage is blocked at night
with thorn branches, which serve the purpose of a barbed-
wire entanglement.

A chief or a nyireth may have three or four huts in his 342
enclosure. The huts are made with walls of well-puddled [565]
cotton-soil mud about five feet in height, surmounted by a
high conical thatched roof. The floor is often a little below
ground level with a semi-circular step sometimes decorated
with an inset pattern of mother-of-pearl, coloured glass, [591]
or fragments of pottery at the threshold. One of the two
huts is used as the living and sleeping room, the other [343]
for cooking and the storing of the grain supply. The fence
which encloses the homestead is about eight feet high and 351
is constructed of millet stalks closely fastened together;
it is set close to the walls of the houses. On the outside it is
strengthened by cross-ties of stalks bound together, and the
number of these cross-ties is regulated by strict custom: an [565]
ordinary Colo may have three or four, a chief or prince up
to six, and only the fences around the king's enclosure have
eight.

The largest building in the village is the communal cattle 343
byre which is built like an ordinary hut, but about thirty
feet in diameter. The high pitched roof, because of its great
span, is very heavy and has to be supported by strong
branches of trees based solidly on the floor and wedged
tightly against the slope of the roof. In an open space near
the byre thirty or forty stakes are driven into the ground,
standing perhaps a foot above it; at first sight these might
give one the impression that the villagers indulge in the
simple pleasure of a game of quoits in the cool of the evening
when the day's work is done, but they are for the much [233]

[233] more practical purpose of tethering the cattle as towards sunset they come winding back from the pasture. In the hot months, if there is no danger from lions, they are left all
[513] night in the open and the byre is used as a dormitory by the
[343] boys and unmarried men of the village. It is the custom, too, for the unmarried girls to sleep together in vacant huts in
[592] the village, for the sleeping hut of a household is reserved for the householder and his wife and small children.

[415] The rear part of the store hut is taken up by an enormous circular grain basket, four feet high and the same in diameter, standing clear of the floor on a wooden, three-legged stand and safe from the depredations of white ants.
[252] Whenever possible, cooking is done outside, but during the rains it is done over a fire of sticks or millet stalks burning in a hollow scooped out in the floor near the wall. A variety
[415] of pots clutters the floor space: the large earthenware water pot, an earthenware pot and a shallow iron dish for cooking, small beer pots, a number of drinking bowls made from the tough rinds of gourds neatly halved and dried in the sun.
[353] The roofing poles, resting on the mud walls and rising to an apex, form convenient places for tucking away household goods and personal treasures. Such an item one cannot fail
[241] to notice is that of several large heads of grain; these are
[261] stored for the next season's planting, and no matter how desperate the food situation may become, they will remain untouched, for the next year's supply of food depends on this stock of seed. Behind the poles also may be found a fragment of a mirror, a couple of cigarette tins holding a little oil or a handful of beads, a girl's blue dancing cloth or even the
[292] good wife's best Sunday frock, run up for her by the Sisters from some material brought from Kodok, probably some dreadful riot of green and red and yellow, hideous indeed to Western eyes, but to the proud owner more delightful than any Paris creation. Sometimes, to a visitor's distress, a line
[251] is slung across the hut on which hang dried fish or strips of meat. The high tone of these delicacies, the myriads of flies they attract and the thick, black smoke of the fire which, having no means of getting away, fills the hut, do not make

the place very inviting, or, if one must enter, tempt one to 343
linger. One is happy to conclude's one's business and escape
to the comfort of the hut opposite.

This is the living and sleeping hut, and is usually much 342
more clean and tidy than the other. The hard earth floor is [356]
neatly smoothed over with mud and carefully swept. Several
cow hides hang on the walls or rest against them, and one of 352
these is placed for the visitor to sit upon crosslegged, or a [516]
small platform made of light ambac wood may be brought
forward for his accommodation. Lying against the wall is 411
also the tall war shield of toughened hippopotamus hide [237]
belonging to the master of the house and his two spears, one
his fighting spear, seven feet in length with a broad, smooth,
highly polished, leaf-shaped blade on a straight, slender shaft
of brown wood; the other his fishing spear, a foot shorter in [227]
length and with a long, narrow, triangular blade armed with
ugly, serrated barbs. Inside the hut we may find several 516
men; some sit in the neat way the Shilluk have with one foot
tucked beneath them, a posture impossible for a stiff-jointed
European, but one which they can maintain for long periods
without the slightest discomfort. The host is dispensing beer 273
to his guests from a large pot placed in the centre of the 574
floor, and a generous bowl, holding about a quart, will be
offered to you. This beer is made from fermented millet, and
looks, and tastes, rather like cold cocoa. Courtesy demands
that you take some, so you sip a little slowly, balance the
bowl in your lap for a while, take another small drink and
hand the bowl to your neighbour who finishes it off with
avidity. You linger over a cigarette while the others pass 276
round a pipe filled with rank, home-grown tobacco, or, if 574
this is scarce, with charcoal. A Shilluk pipe has a large bowl
made of clay, fire baked, fancifully carved and picked out [531]
in red and white and black; into this is fitted a wooden stem,
two feet long and an inch in diameter, with a bulbous
mouthpiece made from the stem of a gourd. With a complete
disregard for hygiene a member of the party takes the
pipe from the man next to him, puts it to his mouth, sucks
vigorously for a few moments, his cheeks going in and out

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[276] like bellows, and then passes it on. Pipe and beer circulate freely, and under the mellowing influence of both, tongues are quickly loosened and conversation turns to the perennial
[521] topic of cattle. After a while, your cigarette finished, you will excuse yourself to your host and, rising from your cramped position, greet everyone present in turn and make your escape into the open air.

512 The Shilluk, sensible man, starts his day with the sun. He emerges from his hut, however, with heavy head and blood-
[513] shot eyes, since he has been sleeping for seven or eight hours in a small windowless hut with the doorway blocked with a heavy grass mat and perhaps a smoky fire burning as a
[372] protection against mosquitoes. As a further defence against
[825] these pests he covers himself from head to foot with the red
[751] ashes from the cow-dung fire, but this does not worry him; if there is water handy he may rinse his hands and face,
[515] if not, he will remain as he is until his next visit to the river —perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow or the next day—gives him the chance of taking a bath.

Gradually the village comes to life: the women appear, winding their drab-looking cloths round them, and set off
[484] on their daily pilgrimage to the river with the heavy water pots balanced on their heads. The little group breaks up and the women fall into line, one behind the other, as they reach the narrow track leading out of the village, chattering like starlings as they swing along. The boys come out of the
512 byre smothered like their elders in the red ashes in which
857 they have been lying all night, looking like imps from the
[233] lower regions. They begin to clean up round the tethered
[372] cattle, collecting the cow dung and spreading it out to
[234] dry in the sun for fuel. When this is done they milk the cows and goats. From one compound comes the sound
[252] of dull thumping as some girl pounds the millet grain into coarse flour. The grain is small and hard, red or white in colour. It is first winnowed by being poured at shoulder height from a basket and then sieved in a boat-
[415] shaped scoop of plaited fibre. The grain is then put into a

narrow circular hole in the ground about a foot deep, and 512
steadily pounded with a heavy, six-foot pole wielded with 857
all the strength a young pair of arms and shoulders can bring 252
to the task. The coarse flour which results from this operation
is soaked in water and then ground again, this time
between two hard, rough stones. The flour is ready for use;
it is mixed with water and boiled in a shallow iron dish to
make a thick porridge, and this, flavoured with a little salt [263]
if that is available, and mixed with a little milk, constitutes [262]
the meal. Young women, however, are denied the luxury of [853]
milk, unless they are nursing a baby.

By the time the women have returned from the river, 512
ground the flour and cooked the porridge, it is already nine
o'clock. If it is the dry season and there is no work to be done
in the fields, the men have been sitting around since sunrise
busy perhaps with some task such as making a grass rope or [283]
weaving a fish trap, or merely gossiping away the time until
their food is ready. When a woman has cooked her husband's 512
breakfast she takes it into the living hut, and then leaves 264
while he eats. She never eats with him, though she may
return later, before he has finished, and eat her own meal
sitting apart; she may also join other women and eat with
them. When breakfast is over the men resume their tasks, 512
and if there is a nice part of the river bank shaded with trees,
such as is to be found at Detwok, they will take their rope
making and weaving materials or their fishing net and pass
the day there pleasantly enough. The young boys untether 233
the bleating sheep and goats which pour out of the village 857
running in search of grass and water, followed by their herds
who add to the din by yelling and whistling; the cattle
follow at a more leisurely pace in charge of the older boys.
Soon the village is empty of animals save for the mangy, 512
half-starved dogs nosing about for scraps of food, and the [231]
scraggy chickens picking up grains of millet scattered here
and there in the compound. The little girls appear, staggering [857]
under the weight of the fat babies they carry on their hips.
The women and the older girls go about the never-ending
household tasks, cleaning up after their untidy menfolk,

512 pounding and grinding the flour in preparation for the evening meal. Some of them will go off to the neighbouring [439] forest to collect firewood to sell to the mission, or they will gather some of the small eggs their undersized hens produce and take them to the Sisters to sell or exchange for a little oil or salt or cloth.

So the day passes: the village drowses under the fierce heat of midday and afternoon, but comes to life again as evening approaches. The men return from the river bringing the results of their day's labour, a few stout cow ropes, a new doormat, or a string of fish to supplement the supplies for the evening meal. The cattle stream in again and are tied up and milked by the boys, the dried cow dung is collected into heaps and set on fire and soon a cloud of thick, acrid smoke drifts low over the village. Fires begin to twinkle through the gathering dusk as preparations are made in the various [262] compounds for the cooking of supper—boiled millet flour again with perhaps the addition of a little fish. The moon is nearly full and by the time supper is finished is sailing high in the heavens, lighting up the village with silvery brilliance. 512 It is the invitation to the dance. A huge fire is lighted in the 536 middle of the dancing floor, the drums are brought out and —on with the dance. Food is plentiful at present and the fishing has been good of late, so they dance because they are happy. Or perhaps food is scarce and there is no fish to be had, and supper has been meagre, or even non-existent. They dance just the same to try to forget their emptiness and misery. Any excuse will suffice, or no excuse at all. The tom-toms begin to throb, boy faces girl, and the dance begins. The booming of the drums and the yelling of the dancers, assisted by a gentleman who winds the same three [533] notes on a kudu horn with maddening persistency, defeat all attempts at sleep in the mission half a mile away. We thump our wet pillows and call down blessings on the merrymakers. The revels continue far into the night, but at last, about midnight, even the Shilluk have had enough and, exhausted, crawl into their huts to sleep. Silence falls on the place, but it is shortly broken by the mournful howl of a prowling hyena.

Immediately every dog in the district is awake and alert 512
and the peace of the night is shattered by a cacophony of
furious barking. In the mission we thump our wet pillows
and call down blessings on the dogs and the hyena. Eventually
quiet is restored as the hyena's howls die away in the
distance. The village sleeps.

Such then, in brief, is a description of Shilluk village life, 461
yet our understanding of these people would be very incomplete
without a more detailed picture of their activities,
their work and their play. To them, as to most of the
inhabitants of the continent of Africa, the common saying,
'to work like a black', is scarcely applicable, for the Shilluk
is no fonder of work than the next man, and he is not one
of those restless individuals who are never happy unless busy
with hand and brain making and mending and improving.
Yet there are times when he must bestir himself, for he is
essentially self-supporting. From soil and river he must provide
himself with what he requires for food and shelter, and
beyond this bare minimum of subsistence he must strive to
get something more which he can sell or exchange for a cloth
for himself and his wife, for a handful of salt and a drop of
oil. If his labours yield no such margin, he may have to offer [464]
his services to the mission or the trader to earn the money to
procure what he cannot provide himself. The Shilluk is, and 463
indeed has to be, a man of all trades. To get the grain for his
food he must farm the land, and although his methods of
husbandry may be primitive, he is expert in the traditional
way of farming. In fishing he is skilled in the use of the net,
harpoon, spear and fish trap, and gets the best results
possible from these methods. His house is neat and strongly
built, and, according to one missionary of wide experience, [342]
is among the best thatched of all African houses. To cross
the Nile on his fishing expeditions he must have a boat of [501]
some kind, and from a light, cork-like wood called ambach [824]
which grows plentifully in the Detwok area he constructs a
beautiful, unsinkable canoe, light enough to be carried by
one man, yet able to carry three people in perfect safety.
To roof his house and make fences around it he uses the [824] [283]

463 stalks of millet, binding them together with ropes which he
524 makes of grass. The same grass provides him with the
[283] thatch for the roof, mats for his door, ropes of varying
strength to tether his goats and cattle, and a rope of great
thickness and strength to assist him in the dangerous sport
of hunting the hippopotamus. From reeds gathered by the
riverside he weaves grain baskets and fish traps. If a cow of
463 his falls sick he can act as a veterinary doctor, and if he fails
[232] to effect a cure for the animal, he is quite competent at least
to cure its hide! He makes his own pottery, beautifully
[323] symmetrical and balanced, without the aid of a wheel, and
fires it in an earth oven, and grows the calabashes which
[415] provide him with drinking bowls. He can turn his hand to
[294] shoemaking, fashioning a clumsy but serviceable sandal from
[237] hippopotamus hide and cow skin by using his spear blade
very cleverly as both knife and awl. When his work is done
he will fill his home-made pipe with tobacco he has grown
and cured himself and gratefully drink the beer that his able
wife has brewed for him. There are, naturally, some among
them who are more gifted than others, or who show a special
aptitude in some particular craft and therefore specialize in
it. Thus, a Shilluk householder who wishes to have a superior
type of thatching on his house will call in an expert to do it;
yet such experts are comparatively few, because they are
unnecessary in a community where each one is brought up
to do everything for himself, and has no other work to
prevent him from living a communal tribal life in full. The
one craft that is completely exercised by a special few is that
[324] of the blacksmith, and this because ironwork is so small a
need in the life of the Shilluk. It is true that his two spears
[411] and the small hoe he uses for cultivation are indispensable
[412] to him, but once he acquires them they last a lifetime,
and it would be a waste for him to collect the—to him—
elaborate and expensive tools of the blacksmith's trade for
which he would seldom, or never, have use. If ever he
[437] needs a new spear or hoe he will, by buying or bartering,
obtain it from the local smith, or—as is more likely in
[439] these modern days—make his way to the nearest Arab

463

or Greek merchant and purchase one imported from [437]
England. [439]

The most important and busiest months in the Shilluk
year are those of the rainy season, from June to November. 241
When the first rains fall, the villagers go out to prepare [221]
their fields for planting. The main plantations are generally
at a considerable distance from the village, sometimes as [361]
much as ten miles inland; the small patches of maize and
millet around the villages, usually cultivated by the women, [462]
are for a quick crop that can be used as soon as it is ripe. After
the first few showers the grass is burnt and the ashes left to
be washed into the soil. When enough rain has fallen to
soften the ground, planting begins. There is no preliminary
back-breaking hoeing or digging; the Shilluk would regard
as crazy anyone who would suggest that such a thing was
necessary or would improve the land. He would say that if
the rains are good and all other circumstances favourable
to growth, he will get enough grain to last him for the year,
whereas if fortune is adverse, all the digging in the world
will not fill his store basket. What was good enough for his [178]
fathers away back to the time of Nyikang is good enough for
him; why should he try to improve on the wisdom of the
ancients? If this particular patch was sufficient for his father
and his father's father, why should he go to the trouble of
clearing another? One of the Fathers in Lul, an expert and 447
enthusiastic farmer, tried to convert the schoolboys to a 241
better system of farming by showing them the benefits of 177
digging and manuring the land. He divided an area of
ground into two equal parts, planting one half according to
the Shilluk and the other according to his own improved
method; yet even the sight of the bumper crop that he obtained
failed to impress the boys: it was not the Shilluk way
of doing things and therefore not for them. And so, the 241
husbandman with a sharp pointed stick removes a small
divot from the unbroken surface, drops in a few millet seeds
and pushes back the soil with his heel as he moves on. When
the whole field has been sown in this manner, he is content
to sit back and leave the rest to the beneficence of Nyikang,

241 but unfortunately for him, grass and weeds have a way of pushing up along with the grain and so, several times during the growing season he is forced to go out to his plantation and put in a day's weeding. If he is unduly industrious, he will plant beans, marrows, or pumpkins amongst the millet, and may even clear another patch and grow some maize; yet these are luxury crops—asparagus and strawberries, as it were—growing more quickly than millet and serving to fill up the lean time between the finishing up of one year's crop and the harvesting of the next.

The first month or so of the rainy season is a time of great anxiety as to whether the rains will be sufficient to sustain the growing crops. Sometimes the planting operation is attended with disappointments; a prolonged drought sets in and the young plants wither and die. A torrential downpour gives the husbandman new hope and out he goes to plant again, but this time one storm of rain after another washes the young shoots out of the ground. A third time he plants, and this time the fates are kind; the seed takes firm root and with constant and not too violent rain flourishes and gives promise of a good harvest; however by this time it is mid-July or even later, so that the crop will be late in ripening and he will be hungry before he can harvest it. The first crop 243 to be planted is red millet which grows and matures more quickly than the second variety, the white millet. If conditions are favourable the original sowing is firmly established by the end of July, and he proceeds to the planting of the second variety. This is more hardy when growing and more resistant in store to the depredations of ants and weevils, but it is ravaged by the myriad flocks of weaver birds which descend upon the ripening fields and by the animals of the forest which gorge upon the crops to such an extent that sometimes they kill themselves by going to drink immediately after filling their stomachs with the unripe grain.

The plants which survive the attacks of flood and drought, of insect, bird and beast grow to a height of eight to ten feet with stalks half an inch thick supporting the heavy oval-shaped heads of grain. The red millet is ready for harvest about mid-October, and then the large heads of grain are 243 cut off and stacked on tables to dry out before being loaded into baskets and carried off to the village by the women. The stalks are left standing in the fields to be collected when they are needed. For the time being, then, the Shilluk is contented, having plenty to eat and drink. If the harvest 185 has not been too good, he still has enough food for the next six months, and beyond that he refuses to look. Why should he worry about next year when he might be dead by then? His wife, equally thriftless, will load her basket with the golden grain and set off to the nearest merchants, perhaps [432] ten or fifteen miles away, to exchange it for a handful of piastres. She knows full well that before the next rains have even begun she will have to go back to the same merchant to buy back her grain at twice the price she was given for it, or watch her family struggle in semi-starvation for the remainder of the year, but that does not deter her from crossing the road from the grain store to the general store [443] run by the same merchant and squandering her money on a few strings of beads, a few feet of copper wire, a small mirror or such other trifles.

In the new year, when the swamps and khors are draining 842 back to the Nile and the tall grass is drying and yellowing [221] under the fierce heat of the sun, it is time to think of rebuilding and re-thatching. A well-made house will stand the rigours of perhaps ten rainy seasons; a good thatched roof for two or three. After the roof has been renewed three times, the cracking and crumbling walls are beyond further patching up, and the house must be pulled down and rebuilt. Building is a community affair, and the builders are paid [476] for their labour in beer, the brewing of large quantities of which is an essential preparation for the work.

If a new hut is to be built, a circle of about twelve feet in diameter is marked out on the ground and a shallow trench dug round the circumference. Stakes are driven into this every six inches, so that they stand four feet above the ground, and these are bound together by coarsely plaited grass ropes woven around and in and out from bottom to top.

342 Meanwhile a shallow pit is dug nearby, and to the broken
soil sand and water are added, the mixture being puddled
by vigorous treading till it has the consistency of a thick,
sticky paste. When the rope weaving is finished, this mud
paste is plastered on the wall within and without at the same
time, until the whole is a solid mass about a foot thick.
Another party of men is busy in the meantime preparing the
framework of the roof; the older men make six thick rings
of grass completely bound around with rope, graded from
twelve feet to one foot in diameter; the younger men select
six straight tree branches about seven feet long and as
thick as a man's arm, and bind these to the largest of the
grass rings with rope to form the base of a cone. The re-
maining rings are then tied inside the cone from base to
apex which is then overlaid with millet stalks, securely
fastened, and the framework is now complete and ready for
342 lifting on to the top of the wall. These various stages of the
476 operation are marked by the drinking of beer; the bowls
are first filled when the mud is slapped on to the wall, a
second time when the walls are finished off, and lastly when
the roof is secured in its place. This marks the end of com-
munity labour, for the thatching can be done by one man
assisted by a boy to throw the bundles of grass up to him.

342 The thatcher begins at the base of the roof tying bundles
of fine grass around the edge to form the eaves; the bundles
overlap and hang about a foot over the edge of the frame-
work. Sheaves of coarser grass are laid over these and fastened
into position by rope laced through the millet stalks of the
framework; at the apex the grass is gathered to a point,
tightly bound with rope and neatly trimmed off. When the
[462] thatching is done, the women clean up the floor inside the
hut and smooth it over with mud so that it has a firm,
cement-like surface, and the house is then ready for occupa-
342 tion. This is a typical Shilluk dwelling; the king's own house
644 may be a little better built and more elaborately thatched,
183 but it will not differ in size or construction from this. Tradi-
tion must be observed, and as long as the king is content to
live in a round house with mud walls, no window and only

a small hole for entrance, no Shilluk may dare to build 342
himself, say, a square hut, or improve the light and ventila- 644
tion of the traditional dwelling by putting in a window. 183

The Shilluk is a fine fisherman, adept in the use of har- 226
poon, fishing spear and net. The harpoon he uses consists of [227]
a loose barbed head of iron which is fitted into the socket of a long bamboo pole to which it is attached by a length of thin but extremely strong twine. When a large fish is caught on the barb, it jerks the head from the socket, and is then played by the fisherman until he is able to finish it off with his fish spear. The spear itself is normally used in the shallows of the river or swamp; the man casts it repeatedly into the soft mud as he walks along, hoping to spear the mud fish which lie in great numbers under the surface.

The use of the net by an expert is a delightful thing to
watch; the net is large, fine-meshed and circular in shape, [227]
weighted round the edge with pieces of lead. The fisherman gathers it in folds over one arm and casts it with a clean, effortless sweep; it falls lightly on the water in a perfect circle, sinks slowly to the bottom and then is slowly gathered in. If it is empty, it is folded and cast again with the same easy, graceful motion.

Fishing is done all the year round by individuals, but the
real season is from March to May when the river and the [221]
large inland water-courses (the khors) are at their lowest
level. During this time several villages will combine together [628]
to fish a certain khor, and as women as well as men join in, [476]
it becomes a real community effort. The day before that [462]
appointed for the fishing, men will go to the khor and block up its outlets, then on the day itself there is a general exodus from the villages, the men carrying harpoons and spears, and canoes if the river has to be crossed, the women carrying heavy nets, and cooking pots too if the start is early. Arrived at the khor, the women fix the nets on poles firmly pushed into the deep mud, side by side, right across one end, leaving no way of escape. The men line up abreast at the other end and move slowly towards the nets, thrusting into the mud

226 with their harpoons and spears and driving the fish before them. The fish that escape the spears and are caught in the nets are collected, and the operation is repeated again and again until the late afternoon when either the fishing or the fishermen are exhausted and the party returns laden with the burden of the catch. It sometimes happens that the fishing is not successful, and the fishermen return with a very poor load, or even nothing at all. Once I met such a party coming back dejected from a full day's fruitless toil; all that they had to show as the result of eight hours' strenuous work in the sun was a large rat dangling from the end of a spear. On another occasion the fishing had hardly begun in earnest before one of the men was seized by a large crocodile. I am sorry to say that his companions in their panic ran off and left him to his fate, but he attacked the brute with his spear and managed to free himself. Needless to say, the fishing was
[797] abandoned for that day. The Sisters nursed the victim, whose thigh was badly lacerated, and after some months, thanks to their care, he recovered completely. When these communal fishing expeditions take place, the school might
[872] as well be closed for all the learning that is done. It is just as impossible to keep the boys to their lessons, as it would be to keep a class of English boys if a cup-tie were being played on the school football field. So when the vanguard of the fishing party passes the school, we call it a day and send the pupils off. If the results are good, there are empty places in the classroom for many days afterwards, for the boys who live locally stay at home as long as the good living lasts.

224 For the Shilluk youth who finds community fishing a dull affair, in spite of the dangers of being seized by a crocodile or being harpooned by an over-excited companion, there are always the hazards and profits of hunting hippopotamus. The hippo which are so numerous in the Nile, and particu-
643 larly in the Bahr-el-Gazal, are strictly royal game. The
687 Shilluk may hunt if they wish, but a large portion of the
224 carcase must be sent to the king in Fashoda, and a hunter who refused to do this, or tried to conceal his 'bag', would

soon find the king's wrath heavy upon him and his cattle 224
taken to satisfy the outrage on the royal dignity. Hippo [213]
hunting is done by night as well as by day. At night the [687]
hunters lie in wait for their victim as he emerges from the river to eat and sleep. On the morning of the day of the hunt, one or two men will go out early to look for the place where the hippo has lain up during the night, and from it they trace the path he has made through the tall grass and reeds to the water. In the evening four or five hunters go to the place and lie hidden in the grass. As the beast comes up from the water they stab it with a short, heavy harpoon, and if it falls, hamstring and then kill it. To the shaft of the [411]
harpoon is attached a long line with floats of ambach wood tied at intervals. If the wounded animal is able to plunge back into the river the hunters will follow its flight in their canoes, provided there is a good moon. When the hippo surfaces for breath they attack him again with a harpoon, trying to strike him in the back of the neck and in the nose, and this second attack usually finishes him off. He submerges again, but in a couple of hours floats to the surface like an enormous balloon and is easily pushed into the shallows, and there left to be cut up at leisure the next day. The hunters in the meantime go off in search of another victim, and thus in one night may take three or four beasts. If the night is too dark for them to pursue their victim, they leave it till the morning when they search the river carefully for the floats which are sometimes found tangled up in the long grass on the bank. In the daytime they will boldly strike at a hippo from their canoe, as he surfaces to breathe, and pursue him, attacking constantly until he is killed. The people of the village nearest the spot where the carcase is [628]
floated ashore assist in cutting it up, and receive a portion of the meat and hide as their reward. The choicest parts, [643]
including most of the fat, belong to the king and must be sent to Fashoda; the chief, too, levies a generous share for himself, and the rest belongs to the hunters.

Of course a hippo hunt is not always such a one-sided affair, for occasionally the wounded animal will turn on its

224 tormentors and overturn and smash the canoe, killing or maiming its occupants. In Tonga I once saw a youth whose shoulder had almost been torn away by a hippopotamus. With some companions he had been hunting in the Bahr-el-Gasal when the hippo they were attacking charged the canoe and flung its occupants into the water. He had the misfortune to fall near the enraged animal which seized his shoulder with its powerful teeth and tore the flesh. He had been taken first to the mission of Yoynyang where the priest dressed his wound as best he could, and then brought on to Tonga. When I saw him he was sitting quite impassively,
152 enduring the pain with stoicism as the Sister dressed his torn shoulder while waiting for a boat to take him to the
749 hospital in Malakal.

224
787 One peculiar feature of a hippo hunt is that the hunters, before beginning their operations, sacrifice a hen by drowning it in the river. They then bury it in the reeds at the river's edge and one (sometimes two) of them, shaking convulsively, goes into a kind of ecstatic frenzy during which he foretells the number of beasts that will be killed; one may plump for three, two large ones and a small, the other for five, three big and two small. It is remarkable that a single 'shaker's' forecast is often completely accurate, though whether this is due to his making a lucky guess, or being prompted by his guardian angel, I would hesitate to say. It is significant, however, that in later life many of these
756 amateur prophets become witch doctors.

461 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' is a saying as true of the Shilluk as of any other race of mankind, and after all his sowing and reaping, building and thatching, fishing and hunting, his 'capacity for innocent enjoyment is just as great as any honest man's'. A European travelling through Shilluk country on a hot, windless afternoon and seeing a cloud of dust rising into the air at some distance before him might wonder what freak of nature was causing a dust storm in that particular spot, when all around was so still and breathless. Approaching nearer to the phenomenon,

the roar of voices and the clashing of weapons might well 461 make him apprehensive that he would soon find himself on the scene of a bloody battle between two rival villages. However, the reality would prove such fears unfounded, for he would merely discover that the dance was on, and that Shilluk youth was taking an afternoon off to enjoy itself. The Shilluk is fonder of dancing, we may suppose, than of 535 anything else in the world. He will walk, or rather run and leap and jump, for miles to a place where dancing is to take place; and as he goes along he will lift his unmusical voice in raucous song, or give vent to blood-curdling whoops, springing high into the air and lunging with his spear at imaginary foes. Then for the next two or three hours he will bruise his great flat feet by pounding them on the ground, and yell himself hoarse, yet return home at the end of it not a bit less exuberant than when he set off. It may be the rainy season when the food stores are at their lowest level, and he will return home to a damp, fireless hut and an empty food bowl, but he does not mind; if he cannot eat and drink, at least he can make merry, and the dance will continue tomorrow and the day after too.

The day of his first dance marks a high light in the life of 536 a Shilluk boy. Up to this he has been a wistful onlooker, a 881 mere boy among other boys, whose occupation has been the minding of sheep and goats, the cleaning out of the cattle byre, the fetching and carrying for his betters; now, however, he has become as good as they are. He may dye his cloth as red and do up his hair as elaborately as they; carry real spears, not just some blunted cast-off a good-natured elder brother has given him; sit in council among his equals; take up his good new spear, if necessary, in defence of his village or his tribe.

On the day of the dance therefore, he attires himself with great care; his body shines with oil and is liberally powdered [302] with red ochre; his hair is dressed in the way beloved of [292] Shilluk youth; since 'tails' are *de rigueur* for these functions, he [237] wears them: an antelope skin bound round his waist by a [301] coloured sash with two strips of skin from the legs hanging

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881 down at the back; round his neck, instead of a white tie, he
[292] wears a collar of discs cut from the shell of an ostrich egg
[294] and a necklet of hair from the tail of a giraffe; his face is
[302] painted in some tasteful design in red, white and blue; his arms are loaded with all the beads he possesses or can beg, borrow or steal, and if he can fasten a large clanging bell to one elbow, he is extra pleased; his legs are cross-gartered with strings of metal shells, the size and shape of mussel shells, which give a most satisfying clashing sound when he moves; in his right hand he carries the three-foot
[illegible] long dancing stick of brown wood adorned at the top with two lugs of leather, in his left he grasps his dancing shield, a short, thick cylinder of ambach wood. Thus accoutred, he
535 takes his beautiful new spear in the hand which holds the
881 dancing stick, and with great pride sets out, surrounded by a bevy of admiring females, to join a number of his fellow dancers. Some of these are neophytes like himself, others have long since tasted the sweetness of the initiation dance, but all are picturesquely garbed and bedecked in the same way. In single file they proceed, running and yelling, leaping and whooping, towards the distant village where the drums are already beginning to throb and to which noisy throngs are converging from all sides. The girls follow on, no less excited than their brothers and sweethearts, and as they run along they give vent to their feelings in shrill ululations. They are more soberly dressed than the gorgeous males: an animal skin or a dark blue cloth is fastened on one shoulder and falls to the knees; they have anointed them-
[302] selves with oil, put on their best beads, and perhaps smeared a little red dust on the top of their heads and touched up their faces with a little paint. Yet they need not worry that lack of charm or beauty will mean a lack of partners; if there are to be any wallflowers at the dance, they will be among the men, for every girl will have her beau. Nor need they have any misgivings about not knowing the correct steps; a leap upwards and backwards in time with the beat of the drums and a half turn to right and left with every dozen steps is all that is required. It is not grace of move-

ment so much as endurance that is called for at a Shilluk dance. 535 881

The festivities are opened by a salute of the warriors to the assembled chiefs. The leader of the band approaches carrying a bowl of dust and asks the senior chief present or the leading guest to bless the dance; he takes a little dust [788] from the bowl and sprinkles it on the ground while calling down a blessing on the gathering. Then the warriors who are congregated at the opposite end of the field thunder forward with whoops and cries, their spears uplifted to strike, the lust of killing in their eyes; they stop dead in their tracks when the spears of the front rank are but a foot away from the row of chiefs and guests, and a roar of laughter goes up if they succeed in making anyone flinch. A second wave follows the first and so on, until with the onslaught of the last group this phase of the dance ends. The beat of the drums now quickens its tempo, spears are discarded in favour of dancing sticks and ambach shields, and the girls come forward to claim partners. A girl may take part in the [562] dance almost at any age, so that little girls of not more than twelve years of age are found taking their places in the long lines being formed. The dancers arrange themselves two abreast, the boys facing the girls; the boys stand with arms bent and sticks held upright, the girls hold themselves rigid with their arms pressed close to their sides. As three hundred pairs of feet thud down in unison, the ground seems to shake and dust rises in clouds; the drums throb, feet thump, the metal shells clash and bells clang, male voices yell hoarsely and female trill—the din is indescribable. The long lines circle slowly round the dancing floor, the boys jumping forward and the girls backward; in a concerted movement the girls raise their arms as if to ward off a blow and make a turn, first to the left, then to the right, while their male partners make the same half turns, bringing their sticks and shields over the girls' heads to protect them, as it were, from the threatened attack. This movement which is done at every dozen or so steps is the only variation in the monotonous jumping of the dance. A rest is called when the drummers

535 are exhausted, but it is not long before the drumming is
911 renewed with fresh vigour, for there is no lack of volunteers for the privilege of supplying the rhythm required, with a rapid slap of palm or thump of stick.

If our European traveller has halted to watch the dance and stayed as long as this, he will by now be deafened by the noise, choked by the dust and made dizzy by the monotonous movements of the dancers. He will be relieved when at last he is able to make his apologies to his host, ease up his cramped legs from the cowskin on which he has been sitting and make his escape. The din will follow him along the road, until in the distance it becomes a subdued murmur and finally dies away altogether. Behind him the dance continues with unabated enthusiasm, but when the sun begins to go down behind the trees, the party breaks up, and those who took part in it, still filled with the excitement which has possessed them all the afternoon, leap and shout and sing their way homeward. For them life is good. This is only the first day of the dance; there will be another tomorrow, and the day after that. Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow—we dance!

CHAPTER V

A LITTLE HISTORY

BEFORE going on to tell of the government and customs of that tribe of the Southern Sudan whose acquaintance we have already made, it might be as well to pause awhile, and briefly to relate what is known of the history of that country of which their land forms a part. 175

The Sudan (Bilad-el-Sudan: The Country of the Blacks) is that great part of Central Africa which lies north of the Equator between the 5th and the 22nd parallels. Nearly 1,000,000 square miles in area, it is bounded on the north by the Libyan Desert and Egypt, east by the Red Sea, Eritrea and Abyssinia, south by Kenya, Uganda and the Belgian Congo, and west by French Equatorial Africa. Since the great river Nile which flows throughout the length of the Sudan and Egypt is the chief means of communication and an easy method of transport between the two countries, it is to be expected that earliest historical records recount instances of trading and raiding from one country to the other. [101]

By about 2000 B.C. the Egyptians with their vastly superior culture had made great inroads into the northern regions of the Sudan, had founded colonies, built a large fortified town and established a chain of fortifications along the Nile. This colonization lasted for some 200 years and about 1700 B.C. the colonists were withdrawn apparently to assist in the defence of the mother country then in the process of being invaded and conquered by Asiatic tribes, the Hyksos. The Hyksos' domination of Egypt lasted for over a century, but eventually the invaders were expelled and the Egyptians, once more secure in their own country, resumed their colonization of the Sudan. This second period lasted until about 1000 B.C. when, with the decline of the Egyptian 175 648

175 Empire, the Egyptians once more disappeared from Sudanese
648 history.

For the next 200 years there is a gap in the records of relationship between the two countries, but then we find that the rôles of conquerors and conquered are reversed, and that Sudanese kings have successfully invaded and taken possession of Egypt and reign there as Pharaohs. The Sudanese dynasty in Egypt came to an end when the Assyrian hordes swept over the land in 660 B.C. but it continued in the Sudan itself in two separate kingdoms for nearly another 1,000 years, the one kingdom being destroyed by the Romans in 23 B.C. and the other overthrown by the Abyssinians in 350 A.D.

After this there is another blank in Sudan history covering the next 200 years until in 540 A.D. Christian missionaries reached the country from Asia Minor, having been sent by the Empress Theodora of Constantinople. Christianity spread rapidly over Northern Sudan and survived in that region in the north until the land was overrun by Mahomedans from Egypt in 1340, and in the south—that is, as far south as the country round the junction of the two Niles—until about 1500, when there, too, it succumbed to the ever encroaching tide of Moslemism. The next 300 years is a record of inter-tribal fighting and internecine warfare, as, lacking a powerful central authority, the various petty sheikhs incessantly preyed one upon another. The country was thus reduced to anarchy and was easy spoil for the organized invasion which came from Egypt in 1821.

This date may be said to mark the beginning of the modern history of the Sudan. The invasion was made by Mohammed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, then a dependency of Turkey, and thus the conquest was made in the name of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Mohammed Ali lost no time in establishing the country on an organized basis. It was divided into provinces and districts under Egyptian and Turkish officers directed from a Governor-Generalate at the newly founded town of Khartoum, built at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles. Mohammed

Ali's conquest of the Sudan was not for the purpose of 175 bringing peace and prosperity to that unhappy country. He 648 looked upon it as a vast milch cow whose yield was to supply him with the means of realizing his great ambition: the establishment of himself and his descendants as rulers of Egypt and the Sudan, completely independent of Turkey. Hence the primary occupation of the new government was the collecting of revenue in the form of tribute to fill Mohammed Ali's war chest, and of slaves to swell the ranks of the new Egyptian Army he was founding to wage war against his Turkish overlord. Frequent raids were made along the White Nile among the helpless pagan tribes for the purpose of capturing slaves both for recruits for the army and for domestic labour. Mohammed Ali attained his cherished title of independent ruler of Egypt and Governor of the Sudan in 1841, but this achievement did not stay his rapacity or that of his successors and their lieutenants. Indeed during the ensuing years the traffic in human lives reached enormous proportions. Better arming of the slavers' private armies and better organization of the raiding parties enabled them to venture further and further south. Huge parcels of land were farmed out to the merchants who found a rich return for their investments among the hapless people of Southern Sudan. Khartoum became the great slave market and clearing house of the Sudan.

With the accession of Ismael as Khedive of Egypt in 1863 the first attempts were made to suppress or at least to diminish the slave traffic and to formulate some kind of progressive policy for the country. He called to his aid such men as Sir Samuel Baker, Colonel Charles Gordon, Rudolf Slatin and Gessi and appointed them as Governors of Provinces with full authority to stamp out the trade in slaves. That the efforts of these men were not more successful (in one year, for instance, Gordon and Gessi captured sixty-three caravans of slaves) was due not only to the strenuous opposition of the slave merchants themselves but also, and indeed mainly, to the corruption in high places among the Egyptian Pashas, most of whom had a keen financial interest in the business

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and had no intention of being deprived of so lucrative a source of wealth. Ismael's schemes for the betterment of the Sudan included the extension of the telegraph from Egypt to Khartoum, the inauguration of a postal system, the founding of a company to develop the agricultural resources of the country and of a steamship company. His reforms, however, were too few and came too late, and moreover he could not implement his authority with sufficient force to remedy the greatest of all the evils under which the country laboured, the slave trade. Whilst Gordon was at hand the traffic had decreased considerably, but with his recall to England in 1879 and replacement as Governor-General by an Egyptian, it revived immediately and flourished with greater vigour than before.

The unhappy Sudanese, crushed by the oppression of their Egyptian overlords and seething with discontent, were ripe for revolt and wanted only someone who would unite them and lead them in rebellion. A leader was found in the person of Mohammed Ahmed, the son of a carpenter, who had gained a reputation as a religious teacher and ascetic. He declared himself to be the Mahdi, the divinely appointed prophet, and proclaimed a holy war against the foreigners in the Sudan. The movement commenced in August 1881, and spread with surprising rapidity. Lack of appreciation of the situation both at Khartoum and Cairo resulted in the small expeditionary force sent to destroy the insurrection being cut to pieces and in the increasing strengthening of the Mahdists. Kordofan and Darfur provinces were overrun, and when at length in the middle of 1883 the Egyptian Government made a supreme effort to stamp out the rebellion, the Mahdist army easily defeated and almost annihilated the force sent out against it. The whole of the Sudan was now open to the Mahdi.

In February 1884 General Gordon returned to the Sudan with instructions from the British Government to withdraw the Egyptian garrisons. He arrived too late to accomplish anything, however, and lost his life when Khartoum fell to the Mahdists in January 1885. With the fall of Khartoum

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and the death of Gordon all outside influence on the Sudan came practically to an end. But the troubles of the unfortunate Sudanese themselves were by no means over. They had merely exchanged one tyranny for another. Six months after Gordon's death the Mahdi also died and was succeeded by his chief lieutenant, the Kalifa Abdullah; under him slavery, pillage and rapine quickly revived, revolts among the disillusioned tribes were ruthlessly and bloodily suppressed and anarchy reigned undisputed for the next thirteen years.

In 1896 preparations were at length completed by the British and Egyptian Governments for the reconquest of the Sudan. A joint Anglo-Egyptian army under the command of Major-General Kitchener, later Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener, invaded the country through Egypt, and in a campaign which lasted for two and a half years drove the Mahdist forces steadily before it and finally routed them decisively at the Battle of Omdurman in September 1898. The years of tyranny and oppression were over at last.

The new government of the Sudan took the form of a condominium, that is, a joint administration by England and Egypt by which the two countries pledged themselves to administer the Sudan primarily for the welfare of the Sudanese. The history of the Sudan during the past half century is an eloquent testimony of how well this object has been achieved.

The first step taken was to establish law and order throughout the land. The Governor-Generalate was restored but with the difference that the new holders of this exalted office had a far different conception of their duties and responsibilities than had their pre-Mahdist predecessors. The system of division into Provinces was re-established under British Governors who administered their charge with the assistance of District Commissioners. A police force was created, and gradually peace, order and security was imposed on a land which had enjoyed none of these blessings in all its previous history. Fully alive to the necessity of training the Sudanese in order that he might eventually

175 take control of the government of his own country, the new
648 Sudan Government took immediate steps to bring education
to an almost entirely illiterate people. Less than four years
after the Battle of Omdurman, the Gordon Memorial
College was opened by Lord Kitchener in the newly-built
Khartoum as the nucleus of educational development in the
Sudan. Elementary schools were opened to bring the rudiments
[871] of education to the peasantry and later, as the need
arose, intermediate schools, a technical school and a teacher
training college. As the number of literates grew, other
departments acquired their own training establishments.
The Kitchener School of Medicine and the Lee Stack
Laboratories provided for the training of Sudanese doctors,
chemists and dispensers; the Atbara Railways School gave
the young Sudanese the opportunity to take control of the
railway system which covers the northern part of the country
[505] and of the fleet of steamers which operates on the Nile south
of Khartoum. In the Law Courts Sudanese advocates plead
their causes before Sudanese judges and magistrates who
have been trained in the School of Law. The Agricultural
and Veterinary branches have their own training establishments,
many of the senior police and army officers are
Sudanese, and the training of officers in the political and
administrative departments is so far advanced that Sudanese
District Commissioners and Assistant District Commissioners
are now common, and several have been promoted as
Deputy-Governors of Provinces.*

648 For some twenty-five years official educational efforts
871 were confined almost exclusively to the peoples of the north.
797 In the south missionary bodies, both Catholic and Protestant,
without Government aid or recognition, laboured untiringly
among the primitive peoples in their efforts to give them
some share at least of the educational benefits enjoyed by
their more fortunate brethren in the north. Only in 1926
was Government aid given in small measure to help to defray

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* Since this was written all British officials have retired, and except for the Governor-Generalate, Sudanese have taken charge in all departments.

the educational expenditure that hitherto the missionaries 648 had met from their own meagre resources, and it is only 871 during the past decade that official steps have been taken to 797 promote higher education in the south and to assist the missionary organizations in a way commensurate with their labours in the field of education. It must be stated, however, that plans for the development of education in the south were in hand in 1938, but the outbreak of war prevented their being implemented. During the years in which the 648 Sudanese were educationally being reared from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to manhood, the administration and development of their country was in the hands of experts from outside, generally from Britain, which country too, in the beginning, provided the financial assistance necessary to launch the various schemes which such wholesale development entailed. British doctors inaugurated and 743 took control of the public health of the country and gradually 648 established large, well-equipped hospitals throughout the land; in keeping with the number of trained Sudanese doctors, dispensers and medical assistants, dispensaries were opened in more remote districts and administered from each hospital. Engineers developed the railway which the army 648 had laid down to assist Kitchener's campaign against the 505 Mahdists and extended it to cater for the northern half of the country, and for the south built and launched the first passenger and cargo vessels which have grown into the large fleet of steamers which today provide the main passenger and commercial link between the Sudan and the other countries of Central Africa. The Forestry and Veterinary 648 services took in hand the conservation and the improvement both numerically and in quality of two of the country's most valuable assets, her trees and her cattle. Yet the Sudan could not continue indefinitely to depend upon outside gifts and loans to finance her public services. Some way had to be found to provide a regular national income large enough to enable the country to pay her way, and since the Sudan is essentially an agricultural and pastoral country it was on these lines that the problem had to be solved. The

648 solution was mainly found in the large-scale production of cotton.

Since the rainfall in the north is meagre and unpredictable, it was obvious that any large agricultural scheme would have to depend on irrigation, and the most suitable site for this was found to be the Gezira area, the delta formed south of the junction of the Blue and White Niles. The Gezira Irrigation Scheme was initially made possible by the generosity of the British Government which advanced loans amounting to nearly £12,000,000 to cover the cost of the great dam built at Sennar on the Blue Nile, and of the canalization system whereby the cotton and subsidiary crops are irrigated. The Scheme was launched on a large scale with the completion of the Sennar Dam in 1925. Originally the irrigable area was roughly 300,000 acres but has been extended during the years, so that now nearly 1,000,000 acres of land can be brought under cultivation. At its inception the scheme was run on a partnership basis between the Government, the peasant cultivator and a syndicate of experts. The Government supplied the canalization and the water, the cultivator raised the crops and the syndicate provided expert supervision and marketed the cotton. The three partners shared the profits in the proportion of 40% each to the Government and the cultivator and 20% to the syndicate. In 1950 the syndicate's concessions were terminated and its place was taken by a Government sponsored body, the Sudan Gezira Board.

During the years since the end of the war, the Sudan in company with the rest of the world has been going through a period of industrial and political unrest. The former to some extent has been settled by wage increases and improved working and living conditions, the latter is still in the process of working itself out. Once the country had been settled, efficiently policed, effectively administered and set on the road to literacy, the Sudan Government, in pursuance of its policy of eventually handing the land over to self-government, relaxed wherever possible its system of direct administration and called on the local sheikhs and chieftains to assist the District Commissioners in the administration of justice and tribal policy among their own people. This system of indirect rule commenced after the First World War among the nomadic tribes where the sheikh still had the status of patriarch and father of his people, was extended in time to the more permanently settled rural areas and eventually to the townships and municipalities. The late 1930's saw the beginnings of the Sudanization of the Central Government. Educated Sudanese found places in Provincial Councils, and in 1944 on the newly formed Northern Sudan Advisory Council. In 1948 a partly elected, partly nominated Legislative Assembly was set up and January 1954 saw the opening of the first elected Sudanese Parliament, consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives. This essay in self-government under international supervision is to last three years at the end of which period the Sudanese will decide for themselves the future of their country; whether they feel secure and strong enough to face the future completely independent, or whether their interests and security would be better safeguarded by union with Egypt.

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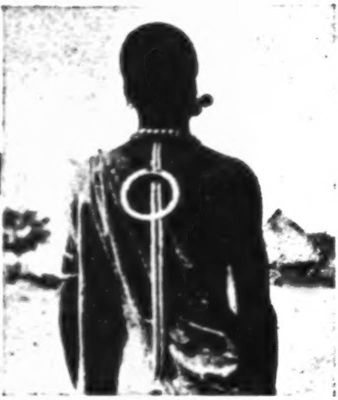
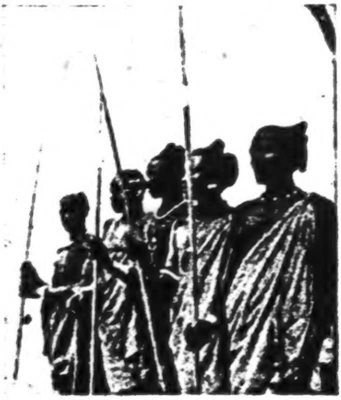


A Shilluk wearing a pair of ivory back-scratchers: a favourite adornment both useful and ornamental

Shilluk warrior in fighting pose

A Shilluk warrior poses against a peaceful background of cattle



Shilluk hair-styles: five 'soup-plates' in different stages of growth

Photos: Fr. F. Spekmakers

Shilluk warriors and Shilluk adornments

[facing p. 52]

CHAPTER VI

SHILLUK GOVERNMENT

643 SUCH is the relation of the Shilluk land to the lands of neighbouring peoples and to the great countries and powers of the modern world. Yet of these latter the Shilluk thinks very little. To him, his country is the world, and its government is all-important to his well-being. That government, [642] and indeed all concept of authority, is centred in the person of the Shilluk king.

'*L'état, c'est moi!*' No French monarch ever uttered that dictum with more assurance than a Shilluk king might have done had he ever heard of it, and thought it worth while to put into words what to him and all the Shilluk was a self-evident truth. Indeed, if a Shilluk were to enunciate his concept of the royal dignity, he would go much further than [642] merely to say that the king is the state, in the sense that he is an absolute monarch who rules his people according to his own dictates, who heeds not, indeed does not need, the advice of counsellors; who merely has to state his wishes for those wishes immediately to have the effect of law. He would indeed claim such despotic power on behalf of his king, though, lest some myrmidon of the Government was within hearing, he would hasten to add that it was no longer exercised and that no modern Shilluk monarch would in fact rule his country in so arbitrary a manner, yet would further aver that the king of the Shilluk is the state, in a way, and to a degree, that no European Monarch ever was; that to say that he ruled by the 'divine right of kings' would be something of an understatement; that he was king, not merely by divine authority and approbation, but that he was a divine king. For every Shilluk king has been and must [186] be a descendant of Nyikang, the great deified hero-king of the Shilluk.

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[facing p.53]

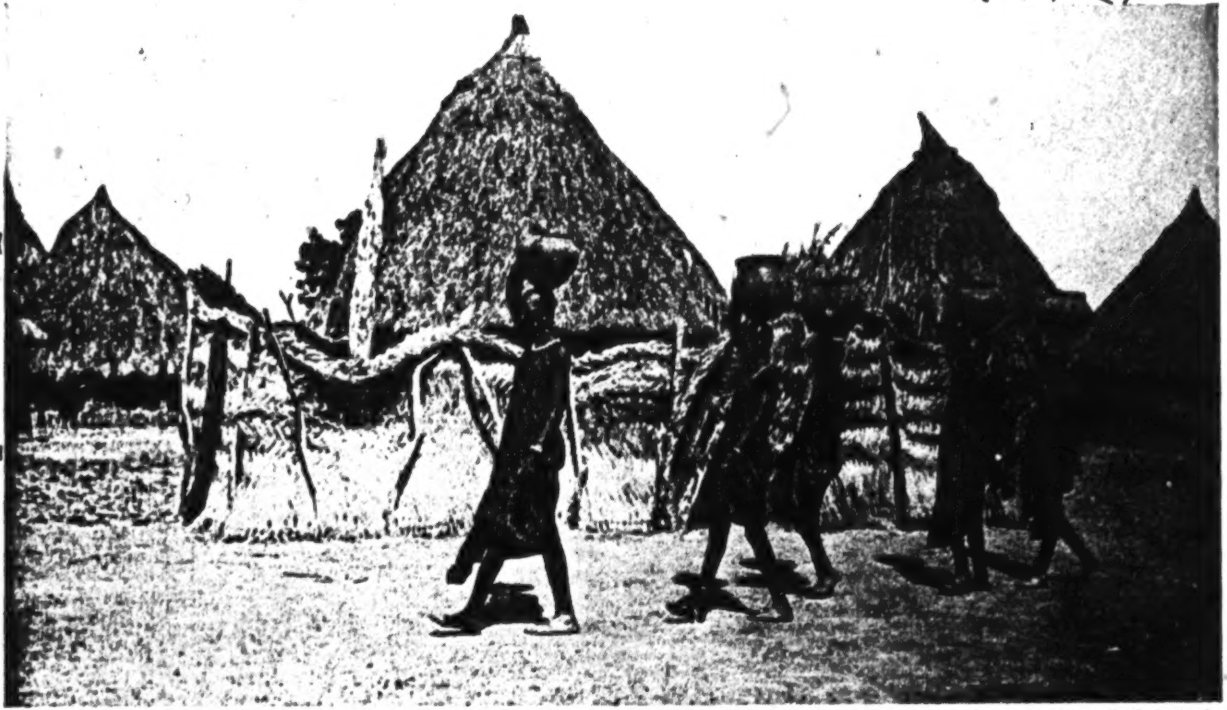

Photo : Fr. F. Spakauskas

A drudge that means a trudge. Shilluk women set off for the Nile to fetch water. From Detwok—a mile each way

According to the tribal mythology, Nyikang was no 643
ordinary mortal. God, it declares, created a great white cow 173
which came up out of the Nile and gave birth to a man child, Dhyang. His grandson Adak married a being who was half woman, half crocodile, and she became the mother
of Nyikang. This affinity with the saurian inhabitants of the [825]
Nile gave Nyikang a special power over them; they came to his assistance during his great trek whenever his further passage was disputed by superior numbers, and at his command they emerged from the river, assumed human form and fought on his side until the opposition was overcome.

Mysterious was his birth; so too was Nyikang's passing from this earth. Being more than mortal, death, the lot of mortals, was not for him, but during a dance he was enveloped in a whirlwind and carried alive into Heaven. And
there he reigns, not God, the great Jwok Atang, but the [776]
glorious divine intercessor with God for the Shilluk people.
Nyikang is very much alive indeed to the Shilluk, for his [775]
spirit enters into every Shilluk king at his installation and dwells in him until his death.

The king, then, is the permanent manifestation of Nyikang 643
to his people. He is their great high priest on earth; [793]
their intercessor for them with Nyikang, even as Nyikang is with God. Nay, more than that. It is conceivable that a European state could flourish and prosper under a sickly, or a mad, or a wicked king, or conversely, could weaken and decline, be its ruler a Hercules in strength and a Solon in administration. To the Shilluk, however, such a thing would be quite incomprehensible; to them the bodily and mental strength of the king exercises an influence upon the whole
tribe, and upon it depends the well-being and the prosperity [731]
of the Shilluk race. Whilst he is strong and in full possession of his faculties the country will be prosperous; should his powers decline, then too will his people weaken and wane. Hence he must not be allowed to become enfeebled physically or mentally, must not be permitted to become senescent. For him there can be no question of abdication, of

643 handing the cares of office to a younger man whilst he spends his declining years in peaceful and happy retirement. He must rule till his death, and if through physical or mental debility he should show signs of allowing the reins of government to slip from his grasp, since nothing but death can divorce him from his office, then he must die. And his loyal subjects will take steps to see that he does die; his women will briskly smother him as he sleeps and so clear the way for the election of his successor. This, then, is the Shilluk idea and tradition of government. Nyikang still rules his people by his immanence in the person of the reigning king, and while all is well with the king, all will be well with the people. It is difficult to understand the dogged persistence of that belief in view of the chronic poverty of the Shilluk, the almost annual failure of their crops, the frequent visitations of pestilence which carry off large numbers of people and cattle, the terror and havoc which was spread throughout the country during the régime of the Mahdists when the tribe was decimated by slaughter and slavery, and all this be the king never so robust in mind and body.

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648 During the past seventy years the absolute power of the king has been severely shaken, at least in temporal affairs. When the Mahdists stalked the land, the kings were generally in hiding. Two were slain in battle, and one, falling into the hands of his enemies, was hanged and his head ignominiously displayed in Kodok, the headquarters of the Mahdist governor, but a few miles from the royal village of Fashoda.

After the defeat of the Kalifa at Omdurman, Kitchener commenced the formidable task of establishing law and order throughout the whole country. Fashoda, a collection of squalid mud huts on the Nile, blazed momentarily in the international headlines and then sank once more into its former obscurity. It might be mentioned here that the term '"Fashoda" Incident' is something of a misnomer. The historic meeting between Kitchener and Marchand took place, not at Fashoda, but at Kodok, some eight miles north
[103] of the Shilluk capital. The name was transferred to Kodok

by the Egyptian rulers of the country during the nineteenth 643
century, but it was never accepted by the Shilluk. 648

One of the first steps taken by the new government [103] towards the settlement of the Shilluk was the deposing and exiling of the king, Kur, whose conception of the royal duties and prerogatives boded ill for the health and well-being of such of his subjects as chanced to cross him in his wrath or thwart him in his desires. Hitherto many a Shilluk Urias or Naboth whose comely wife or humble possessions had aroused envy in the royal breast, had paid for it with his life. The tribal history even recounts that one king killed his wife because she could spit further than he could! With the removal of Kur, however, there went too the King's arbitrary power of life and death over his subjects, and although the government of the country and the administration of justice was still largely left in the hands of the king and his chiefs, it was henceforward to be administered under the eye of the local British officials.

The powerful position and the respect which a Shilluk 643
king enjoys are not, however, without their price. The 682
saying that 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown' may be trite, but it is true; with the pomp and circumstance of the royal state go the cares and worries of government which have undoubtedly caused monarchs many a sleepless night. But although the burden of their office may have been accepted as the price to be paid for its power and glory, and although too there are numerous instances in history of the wearer of the royal diadem dying at the hands of the assassin or the public executioner, still it is not the generally accepted thing that he must thus inevitably perish, and that to assume the purple is in effect to sign his own death warrant. Yet that is the way with the king of the Shilluk. As I said above, upon the physical and mental fitness of the king is deemed to depend the well-being of the whole people, and any weakening of his bodily powers or impairing of his mental faculties means that he must be put out of the way, so that the country may flourish under a more lusty and vigorous ruler. Moreover, it is the recognized right of any potential [669]

643 682 669 king, that is, the son of a former king, to attempt to kill the reigning king and seize the power for himself. The king is, as it were, considered fair game for anyone who, provided he has the requisite credentials, considers himself strong enough singlehandedly to take the life and the title of his lord.

Uneasy then, indeed, is the head which wears the Shilluk crown, for the owner may wake to feel throttling fingers encircling his throat, or heavy folds of cloth muffling his face, or, should he have any reason to think that a pretender seeks his throne, may spend night after night in unwinking vigil, divested of clothes and ornaments which might betray his presence or movements, carrying a blackened spear, prowling ceaselessly around his own village, pausing where the shadows are darkest, magnifying each noise of the night and interpreting it as the stealthy approach of a marauder intent upon his life. I must confess that I have never heard of an attempt being made upon the life of the king by a would-be usurper in recent years, but it would appear that the possibility is always present, and it seems that an attempt to assassinate King Papiti was made about 1930 by a son of the deposed king, Kur. During the past ten years three Shilluk kings have died, and although there is no certainty that any one of them was violently 'assisted' to die, there is equally no certainty that he was not.

643 731 [775] Once the king is dead, either from natural causes or otherwise, a great disquietude and uneasiness settles on the country. Officially 'the land has ceased to be'; the spirit of Nyikang has lost its dwelling place and the country and the people have temporarily lost their protector. All manner of evils may fall on them; famine, pestilence, invasion, and—what comes nearer home and is always a potential danger during the interregnum—civil war may break out should any one of the nyireth who has a sufficiently strong following make a bid to seize the throne for himself. Hence, after the death of a king, the election of his successor is proceeded with as quickly as possible, but it is only with his inauguration, about a year afterwards, that the shadow of disaster is lifted and the land may be said to live again.

The body of the dead king, wrapped in a white cloth, lies 766 in state in his capital of Fashoda. During the course of the second night it is taken secretly to a nearby village for temporary interment, for by tradition the body is not to be buried for about a year after the death of the king, but is placed in a hut which is sealed up. Traditionally, too, the youngest of his wives should be sealed up alive with him, and the hut allowed to fall into ruins and thus form a tomb for them, but happily this dreadful custom is no longer [778] practised.

After an interval of about a year, the remains of the dead king are removed from their temporary resting place and taken, again by night and with secrecy, to his own village where they are buried in a grave dug in the floor of a hut. This is a signal for the people from all over the country to come in for the funeral dances. [535] The number of people who attend the dances is indicative of the popularity that the late king enjoyed among his subjects, and so too is the number [782] of cattle sacrificed. This may run into several hundreds, some of which are contributed by the family of the deceased, but most being the tribute of chiefs and people. The meat of the slaughtered animals is distributed among those taking [264] part in the funeral ceremonies.

Two or three days after the king has been buried, on a 535 day appointed, the warriors armed with spears and war 766 shields and in well-ordered companies, each headed by a flag bearer and marshalled according to the district from which they come, encircle the outside of the village, singing [533] songs in praise of Nyikang and the late king. They then enter the village and dance round the drums and the tomb, stopping at a concerted signal to kneel in homage to the dead, facing the tomb, clashing spear on shield and addressing [533] funeral chants to the king. Once more they encircle the village, this time on the inside, visiting each of the late king's huts in turn, some stepping out of the ranks and peering into the empty huts as though searching for the king and then retiring to give place to the next contingent. Thus the funeral ceremonies continue for two or three days, but

766 at length the drums cease to throb, the last of the animals
535 are sacrificed and the meat distributed to the dancers and
the people disperse to their homes. The king is dead. . . .

643 The country has not, however, remained without a king
all this time. The period of interregnum is one of disquiet,
666 and there is always the real fear that one of the nyireth may
[642] make a bid for the throne. As soon as possible, then, after the
[669] king's death, within a few days in fact, the electorate council
meets to choose the new king. This council is made up of
eleven chiefs of the Colo, the descendants of the original
companions of Nyikang, and three members of the royal
houses.

[175] When Nyikang first settled the country he divided it into
eleven major districts, appointing a chief to each. These
[631] chiefs were all Colo since, as Nyikang was the first Reth, the
Kwareth had not then come into being. These eleven chiefs
form the board of electors, and with them sit three of the
[614] Kwareth, one from each of the three royal houses, those of
Papiti, Fadiet and Yor, whose sons are eligible for the kingship. Among these three families there may be as many as forty or fifty nyireth, entitled as such to consideration for the vacant throne. It is generally accepted, however, though not a hard and fast rule, that the three royal families should provide a king in rotation, and it is certainly understood that the family of the late king is automatically ruled out. Attention is therefore concentrated on the claims of the candidates from the other two houses, with the weight of opinion in favour of that one which has the more remotely provided a king. Many of the nyireth are eliminated at once on account of old age, extreme youth, physical debility, weakness of character, etc., and the merits and demerits of the rest are given serious consideration, until the number is reduced to half a dozen or less from among whom the final choice is made. How selection is finally made is the secret of the council. Sometimes the late king may have 'adopted' a certain nyireth, and thus indicated his wish in the matter of his successor. Such an indication does not mean that the king's protégé will certainly be chosen but it will have great

weight in the deliberations of the electorate. Sometimes, too, 643
when the final choice is a difficult one, it would seem that 666
the selectors have recourse to augury and divination. A 787
number of small stones, one for each candidate, is placed in a fierce fire. A stone that glows red indicates that, under the prince it represents, cattle will be plentiful in the country; a white-hot stone would presage an abundance of grain in the new rule; one glowing both white and red would entail an era of plenty both in cattle and grain, whilst that which merely blackens and bursts would unanimously be rejected.

When the decision is at last reached, one of the great chiefs 643
goes unobtrusively and by night to the village where the king-elect is living. During the deliberations of the electorate all nyireths are required to remain in their own homes and
not to approach the neighbourhood of Fashoda; this pre- 669
caution is taken to ensure that no nyireth should rush the capital and usurp the power for himself. The chief challenges the nyireth to a mock battle and when he has thus given a token of his prowess and valour the news of his election is formally broken to him. He is brought quietly, again under cover of night, to Fashoda, and at daybreak inducted with ceremony into his capital. When these preliminaries are over and the reth-elect is settled in Fashoda, the news of his election is noised abroad, and chiefs and nyireths come in from all parts of the country to pay their respects to their new
king. The situation has become somewhat easier now, since 643
with the accomplished fact, there is little likelihood of an 669
armed insurrection taking place. There is always of course the possibility of any nyireth asserting his right to the throne and proving it by slaying the king in single combat, and in
former days it was customary for the king to slaughter as 178
many of the nyireths as he could lay his hands on—a most effective method of reducing the potential danger to himself.

The period between the election and the solemn installa- 643
tion of the king is roughly a year. During this time the land 642
is, as it were, dead, for the spirit of Nyikang still lacks its 775
habitual abode, and is under interdict. No great public
dances may be held, except the funeral dances for the late 535

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642 reth, no building may be done and the usual burning off of
[535] the grass in the early dry season is forbidden.

643 During this time also active preparations are on foot for the
796 ceremonies of installation. Iron must be obtained and
special ceremonial and presentation spears forged; silver,
[326] ivory and ostrich feathers procured for the making of
[301] bracelets and other ornaments; a hunting party has to make
inroads (either without the knowledge or with the conni-
[237] vance of the government) upon a strictly protected species
of antelope in order to obtain the highly prized skins which
serve the purpose of purple and ermine in the installation
[326] ceremonies. The forging of the sacred spears is introduced
with special ceremony; with appropriate sacrifice new fire
by the immemorial method of the friction of hard wood upon
soft is made and the implements of the blacksmiths blessed.

643 There is great activity during this period of preparation
796 in Akurua in the north of the country, Nyikang's own
778 sacred village. It was from here that the hero-king disappeared
in a whirlwind from the sight of mortal man, and
775 it is to Akurua that he returns in order that he may go to
Fashoda to install his successor as reth. In the shrine at
Akurua are housed the sacred effigies of Nyikang and his
son, Dak, which are carried in procession from Akurua to
Fashoda for the installation. These effigies consist of heads of
[237] ostrich feathers fixed in bamboo sockets, and are in fact
fetishes, since the souls of Nyikang and Dak are believed to
inhabit them. On the death of a king the old effigies are
destroyed and new ones made for the installation of the
reth-elect.

643 When preparations at Fashoda are completed, messengers
796 are sent to Akurua to inform Nyikang that it is time to march
778 to Fashoda. The effigies are then carried out, borne aloft by
members of a clan whose special prerogative this is, and
[614] start on the journey to the capital, a distance of about
seventy miles. The procession moves south at a smart pace.
Dak's mop of feathers on the end of a long bamboo pole
looks like an oversized feather duster; Nyikang's head of
ostrich plumes is very much bigger than that of his son's,

and the bamboo socket into which it is fitted is shorter and 643
thicker. Behind the effigies are carried Nyikang's 'bed', a 796
long forked stick upon which he is propped at night and a [778]
basket of food for his refreshment during the journey. The
bearers are surrounded by men of the same clan whose duty [614]
it is to keep spectators at a distance, and behind follow
Shilluk from the district into which the procession has
entered, who act as an escort as far as the next section. The
march is kept up at a good pace to the accompaniment of [533]
songs sung in honour of Nyikang and Dak. At sunset a halt
is made at the nearest large village. Nyikang and Dak are
put away for the night, Nyikang being propped up on his
'bed' so that he doesn't touch the ground. His bearers and
escort are accommodated in the village, huts being evacu- [574]
ated to receive them and food prepared for them. The next
morning the march is resumed, the people flocking to the
road from all sides to pay homage to their hero-king as he
passes by and joining in the unceasing chants of praise in [533]
his honour. Eventually, after some five days on the road,
the environments of Fashoda are reached. A village, Adodo,
has been set aside for Nyikang and his followers, and they [574]
rest there until the day appointed for the installation, about
three days hence. During all this time the reth-elect has
remained in Fashoda, but when he is informed that Nyikang
has arrived at Adodo, he moves away from the capital and
takes up his residence at Debalo, a few miles to the south.
Nyikang is, as it were, in rightful possession of the territory,
and the king-to-be is in the position of an intruder until he
has proved his fitness to rule.

Between Fashoda and Debalo lies a long narrow water
course, Khor Arepejur. This khor is the traditional boundary [131]
fixed by Nyikang himself, between the north and the south.
On the morning of the first day of the installation ceremonies,
the reth-elect and his followers march towards the khor, the
reth leading by the hand a little girl who is his 'bride' and
who later will be the cause of a dispute between Nyikang
and himself. Arrived at the khor the reth finds stretched out
across his path a black bull, over which he steps. (Formerly

643 796 it was an old man who was stretched across the path for the king and his followers to step across. With such a large following, there was more stepping on, than stepping across, and the man was trampled to death.) His partisans follow suit and the whole army crosses the watercourse and marches towards Fashoda. As it does so, the supporters of Nyikang, bearing the two effigies in their midst, are seen approaching from Adodo. The two forces halt a short distance apart, threats are shouted, weapons are brandished—not spears, fortunately, but millet stalks—there is the usual preliminary feinting and dodging and half-hearted rushes, and then the two armies hurl themselves forward and join in the great mock battle. The air is thick with dust raised by the padding feet of the combatants and clouded with flying millet stalks. When the air clears it is seen that the reth is no longer at the head of his forces. His army has been defeated and he has been captured by Nyikang and carried into Fashoda.

Nyikang, closely followed by the reth, advances to an open space in front of the shrine. [782] A cow is sacrificed and then a screen of white cloth is erected in front of the doorway of the [778] shrine, and the sacred stool of Nyikang is placed behind it so as to be hidden from the public view. The effigy of Nyikang is put down upon the stool and a period of chanting and invocation ensues, the reth meanwhile kneeling and clasping the legs of the stool. Then Nyikang is lifted up and carried into the shrine and the reth takes his place on the stool. This is the solemn moment of the installation; it is the equivalent of the crown of kingship being placed on the head of the monarch. The Shilluk believe that at this moment the [787] spirit of Nyikang enters into and takes possession of the body of the reth. After some time spent in communing with Nyikang, the reth, accompanied by his 'bride', who during all this time has never left his side, leaves the place of installation and moves across to a group of huts temporarily erected for [782] his use. Another cow is sacrificed and the king enters one of [783] the huts for the ritual washing of his feet by his wives. This bathing is done in hot and cold water and signifies that the

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king must not be 'hot' or 'cold' with his subjects, but just. 796 [783]

During the rest of the day the king remains in the seclusion of his temporary camp. Towards evening all fires are extinguished and new fire is made by twisting a sharpened stick in a hole made in another stick. The smouldering tinder is fanned into a bright flame, and the sacred fire is carried off to light the fires in the village. [372]

During the next two days the reth remains in seclusion and certain secret rites are performed. On the evening of the second day he leaves his temporary camp and takes up his residence in a hut on an eminence called Aturwic, just outside Fashoda. He is traditionally 'enticed' there by a girl, and for the first time since the commencement of the ceremonies he deserts his young 'bride' who remains behind in the camp. The next morning the king remembers his bride and asks for her. He is told that she cannot be found and he sends messengers to look for her. They return and say that during the night Nyikang has come and carried her off. The king then sends to Nyikang demanding the return of the girl, but Nyikang flies into a rage and calls his army together to punish this impertinence. Nyikang and Dak now appear outside the shrine where they have lain since the morning of the installation and are joined by a third effigy, Nyikang's [778] second son Col, who is composed of grey ostrich feathers and rope. The three effigies surrounded by their followers now aroused to a pitch of excitement by continuous drumming and dancing, advance towards Aturwic and the king and his *entourage* descend from the mount to meet the aggressors. The king advances boldly towards his opponents and hurls his millet stalk 'spear', which is a signal for a general onrush by his supporters. This time it is Nyikang who is vanquished. The 'bride' is snatched away from him and hurried up the mount to safety and in vain do the warriors of Nyikang counter-attack to recover her. At length they fight their way to the foot of the mound but then Nyikang calls a truce and quietly ascends the eminence accompanied by his sons. Apparently all is settled amicably. The reth has proved

643 himself a worthy successor of his great ancestor; Nyikang
796 reappears and goes back to his shrine where he remains until
he returns to Akurua.

The concluding ceremonies take place the following day
when the chiefs from all over the country gather to do fealty
to their new king. The king, seated on the sacred stool of
Nyikang, faces the assembled chiefs. Each one comes forward
[537] in turn carrying a spear. He makes a speech of praise and
exhortation, and at the conclusion drives his spear into the
ground to signify that he will never raise it against the king.
The king replies briefly to the gathering, thanking the chiefs
for their protestations of loyalty and promising to rule justly.
[782] After the assembly a bull is sacrificed, and the reth makes a
tour of inspection of Fashoda. He pauses outside his father's
house, a sheep is stretched out before the threshold, he steps
over it and disappears into the interior. He has come into
his own.

All over the country there is a general feeling of buoyancy and relief. The shadow is lifted from the land. Nyikang is among his people again . . . long live the king!

643 Perhaps I may be pardoned if to this account of the posi-
797 tion, the installation and death of the reth, I add a few
words on the death of one of the recent kings, Papiti, because of the interest it has for our mission and its work. Papiti must be one of the longest lived of Shilluk kings. The twenty-ninth in succession from Nyikang, he was the son of Yor who had been hanged by the Mahdists in Kodok. He was elected king in 1917, and died in 1943; thus his reign extended over a period of twenty-six years.

From the time of the accession of King Papiti dates the
prosperity of the Catholic missions in the Shilluk country, or
[798] at least dates the time when they ceased to suffer persecution
at the hands of the Shilluk and were permitted to live and do
their work in peace, for Papiti had always shown himself a
firm friend of the missionaries. He was a frequent visitor to
the mission at Lul and often sent presents of hippopotamus
fat, a rare delicacy, and butter. It was his authority and good

sense that saved the struggling mission of Detwok from destruction at the hands of the grief-stricken and enraged villagers when in 1931 the wall of a brick kiln collapsed, killing several boys and girls. He had on several occasions expressed his wish to become a Christian but owing to the political and religious repercussions that would have followed had he, the ruler and high priest of the Shilluk, taken such a step whilst in the prime of life, he had perforce to defer his conversion, but hoped for the grace of baptism before he died. God granted him his desire.

King Papiti became ill in mid-September, 1943. He had indeed been unwell for some time, but was afraid to let it be known to anybody in case the news brought the traditional smotherers to his hut. (On a similar occasion some years before he had had to spend lonely nights in the forest, in fear of his life, until he had recovered from his illness.) Now it was too late for medical skill to do anything for him and he was dying.

We heard the news in Detwok from Eugene, his nephew, one of our best Christians and a catechist. He proposed to go to Fashoda to ask the king if he had meant what he said about becoming a Christian. Being so close a relative of Papiti's and yet having no claim to the throne, Eugene would easily be admitted to his presence. He set off through the swamps and the mud (it was in the middle of the rains) to cover the twenty miles to Fashoda. On arrival there he was eagerly welcomed by Papiti who reiterated his desire for baptism. Eugene therefore gave him some preliminary instruction and without further delay continued as fast as the conditions of the terrain would permit, to Lul, some twelve miles further south. He arrived at the mission in the early hours of the morning and at once aroused Fr. Hurst from his bed. But let Fr. Hurst himself proceed with the narrative:

> In the Shilluk country there are no papers, but news travels fast nevertheless, and we heard that the king was sick. On Saturday, September 18th, at 4.30 a.m. I was

643 797 awakened by a man calling out at my door; very sleepily I asked what was the matter and he replied, 'The king is sick and is calling for the Father to come to him.' The man who called me was a nephew of the king and had already given the king some instruction in the Faith as he was well able to do—he is a catechist in our Detwok mission. I first said Mass and after some breakfast set out for Fashoda, a distance of some twelve miles. I was accompanied by the catechist and the local medical dispenser who was also a Catholic. I had to walk, for the swamps were full and the grass was very high. There was not a breath of wind. Indeed it was a pleasure to wade through the swamps for the cool water was very refreshing to tired and hot feet. We pushed on fast and made only one stop of about five minutes, whilst my escort had a drink. I was offered milk, but as unboiled milk is very dangerous in this country, I refused. When we arrived at Fashoda the whole place had the silence of a sick room, no dogs [195] barked and all the people spoke in whispers as is the custom in Fashoda. I was taken at once to the king's [644] dwelling, which is just the same as any other Shilluk house, except that more care had been taken over its construction. In the house were four women fanning the [237] king with the wings of a saddle-billed stork and the eldest son of Papiti was there too. As soon as I entered the hut, the king sat up and greeted me; he was lying on the [513] floor just like any other Shilluk, but he had a thin mattress on top of the usual cow-hide. He seemed very pleased to see me and at once told the women to leave the hut and I began the instruction. My task was easy for he knew Catholic doctrine and believed it; he knew all the obligations of the Faith. When I put the question to him about his wives he said, 'Father, my soul is the main thing now,' and before witnesses he gave me his promise to be a man of one wife. I baptized him 'Joseph' after our Patron, and it was also the feast day of St. Joseph of Cupertino. He received baptism with great devotion and gave me the impression of understanding to the full the meaning of the

Sacrament he was receiving. He was not unmindful of my 643
needs and sent word that food was to be prepared for me. 797
I was taken into another house—a very special one into 343
which few but the king and his queens enter. A woman
brought me a skin to sit on and then, on her two knees,
presented me with roasted maize cobs and native beer. I 262
was in very great need of a drink for though we had waded
through lots of water we could not drink it; if we did,
dysentery was sure. This special house contained a very
fine collection of animal skins and also the spear of Nyi- 778
kang, a thing most sacred to the Shilluk. There also was
a stick on which were recorded the years of the king's
reign. I was sent a wing of a saddle-billed stork to use as
a fan and these are, as a rule, reserved to the king himself.

At two in the afternoon I said good-bye to the king who
made me a further present of a goat, and I set out for
home. King Joseph, as he was now, had very thoughtfully
ordered an ambach canoe to be brought so that I could 501
cross a very deep swamp on a path that made our journey
much shorter. I was feeling very tired, and every mile my
feet felt like lumps of lead—the last mile seemed very long.
But I arrived home about five o'clock and I announced
in church the good news that the king was baptized and
all the Catholics of the mission rejoiced. There were no
hostile remarks from pagans that I ever heard of. King
Joseph, formerly Papiti, died on September 22nd.

By King Papiti's express wish the customary temporary 766
interment was not proceeded with, and on the night of the
day following his death, he was taken to his own village of
Pareth Papiti (Village of King Papiti) and there buried.
The traditional funeral dances were held in his honour, but 535
took place much earlier than usual, only about six weeks
after his death.

CHAPTER VII

JUSTICE

692 A great part of the work of the king and his chiefs is the
648 administration of justice. This is done under the supervision
[643] of the local British officials, and, of course, has been
restricted in some ways. The former ruthless butchery and
[681] mutilation for petty offences is no longer tolerated, nor is
the sentence of death and the execution of such a sentence
permitted to them. Apart from this, however, it is the policy
of the Sudan Government to encourage the various native
peoples of the country to administer their own territory
according to their age-long traditions and usages. And indeed,
a harassed District or Assistant District Commissioner
with only a handful of police to help him in administering
an enormous area, being neither argus-eyed nor possessed
of the power of being in several places at once, can attend
personally only to a fraction of the cases that continually
come up for attention. He will deal with the more serious
criminal offences, but the majority of disputes and petty
[643] crimes among the Shilluk are heard and decided by the king
[634] and the district chiefs.

577 Whether justice as we understand it, the meting out to an
individual exactly what is his due, is always done in these
cases is another matter. To say, as is often said, that the
African has a strong sense of justice and resents being
treated unjustly, is not strictly true. He certainly resents
being treated unjustly, but often he equally resents being
treated justly when the judgment given is detrimental to
695 himself. Hence, in a criminal case in which he is the accused,
or in litigation with his neighbour, he will cheerfully swear to
577 tell 'the truth, the whole truth,' meaning all the time 'and
nothing like the truth.' Then he spins a most convincing
tale which none of the listeners believes but cannot fail to

admire on account of its ingenuity and plausibility, will 695
bring forward a cloud of witnesses to support his statements 577
and with an air of 'that's my story and it's sticking to me' implicitly challenge the court to disprove it or his opponent to go one better. And if perchance his version of the facts of the case is shown to be the reverse of reality and his witnesses are confounded and made to contradict one another, no one is shocked at such blatant falsehood; the onlookers rather are disgusted at the poor show he has put up and at the poor staff work which has permitted the witnesses to be caught out.

Most of the cases which are brought before the native 691
courts are concerned with the ownership of cattle. They are 583
usually claims for cows to replace the original units of a 422
dowry which have died, or for the return of cattle which have been paid with a view to a marriage which for some reason or another has not taken place, or which, if ratified,
has been broken up owing to the sterility or the unfaithful- 586
ness of the woman. Such cases are tremendously involved and intricate, and only a Shilluk well versed as he is in his tribal laws and customs can possibly follow them. For instance a Shilluk often starts paying cattle for a bride whilst she is still a child, and six or seven years must elapse before she is of marriageable age. The prospective husband may leave the country, having as it were 'staked a claim', only to return later to find that the girl's father has bestowed her on another suitor. The disappointed swain at once demands his cows back but these are beyond recall, having long since been dispersed throughout the country as parts of other dowries. There are, it is true, some cattle left of the second dowry, but no Shilluk worth his salt will easily part with cattle which have once come into the family byre in prompt settlement of a mere debt. So the father puts the angry man off with soft words and fair promises, and then another spanner is thrown into the works; the daughter is ignominiously returned for some reason or other and suitor number two requires that his dowry be returned. Father hopefully offers the rejected daughter to her former suitor,

691 but he now makes it plain that he wouldn't have her as a
583 gift, and indeed has made overtures to another lady, so
422 please may he have his cattle and—just to make things a little more complicated—the calves that they have had, and can he have them at once since his new prospective father-in-law is getting a little nasty about the lack of dowry, and hinting that his daughter's affections may easily be bestowed elsewhere. 'Not quite so fast,' says number two, 'those cows are mine and mine only and quite obviously their calves are mine too, so kindly arrange for the immediate delivery of the same.' Father pours ridicule and scorn on both claimants to the calves. It is true, he admits, that both young men have some sort of a claim to cattle—which he will settle by and by when he gets a bid for his youngest daughter at present crawling round the floor—but for either of them to claim the calves is preposterous; surely they belong to him who has had all the trouble of herding the beasts; to his skill and industry in nursing the cows through the difficult time of calving is due the fact that there are any calves at all! And so the arguments and counter arguments, taunts, recriminations, insults and threats will be tossed back and forth. Tempers will rise and maybe sticks will be flourished and spears flashed. It can happen that one of the parties will work himself into a blind passion and regardless
[682] of the consequences may break his adversary's skull or thrust his spear into him, but generally, fear of reprisals from the clansmen of his opponent and the justice that will certainly be meted out to him by the white man in Malakal, should he survive long enough to be arrested, advises caution; and since none of the contestants is strong enough to take by force what he considers to be his by right, the dispute is eventually, albeit reluctantly, brought up before
[634] the district chief.

695 Reluctantly, I say, because the litigants know full well
693 that whoever is going to lose by the decision of the court, the judge isn't. The plaintiff may marshal his facts with unassailable logic, clothe them in masterly oratory, and present them with crystal clear lucidity. He and his witnesses may even

be telling the truth, and therefore be quite unimpeachable, 695 693
but he is aware that if the verdict is given in his favour it will be, not so much because of the justice of his claim and his forensic skill in presenting it, but rather because he has promised the judge a bigger 'fee' than his opponent has.

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Among the Shilluk the Christian precept of forgiveness of one's enemy does not obtain, but they follow rather the old Jewish principle of retribution for injuries inflicted, and although they will not literally demand 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', there is a recognized scale of payment for all such injuries. The penalty for knocking a tooth [683] out is especially severe, the aggressor having to pay the injured party a cow. For an offence against an unmarried [684] girl, her father will claim three cows, and for adultery the fine is four cows. Woe betide the offender who refuses to [628] pay up; he will be wise to keep clear of the district in which the injured party lives, for the relatives of the latter will most surely wreak their vengeance on his person. In the 682 628 case of homicide, blood payment of ten or more cattle is demanded, quite apart from any penalty that the law may inflict, but sometimes the grief-stricken relatives of the dead person will fulfil quite literally the commandment 'The kinsman of him that was slain shall kill the murderer' (Num. 35: 19), and if perchance he is already in custody and out of their reach will exact vengeance on one of his male relatives. Then the family of the second victim will strive to vindicate their manhood by a raid on the other village and more killings may take place and the feud develop into a minor war, till such time as police can be got to the place and the culprits are arrested.

A grim instance of vendetta occurred in the Lul district a few years ago. A quarrel arose among some youths, tempers rose, a blow was struck and the unlucky recipient died. The aggressor was arrested and sent to Malakal for trial, but a few days later his home was raided and his father murdered as he sat defenceless at his supper. Before police could arrive 628
from Kodok or Malakal, the village of the dead youth was

628 raided in turn, his father speared to death and his brother so seriously wounded that he died shortly afterwards in Malakal hospital. The fact that one of the dead was the chief minister of the king did not deter the attackers from taking his life in retribution for the outrage they considered done to their family. In Detwok, over thirty miles away, we felt the repercussions of this awful tragedy. One of the teachers was a relative of the first aggressor, and he went in fear of his life for weeks after the unhappy event, and despite my assurances that no one would dare raid the mission, he insisted on carrying his spears around with him, even to the schoolroom and the chapel. The affair took place during the school holidays, and the boys from Lul who attended the Central or Teachers' Training Schools at Detwok did not return for some weeks after the new term had started, refusing, until the culprits on both sides had been arrested and security had been restored, to leave the safety of their villages, lest they be ambushed on the road and killed.

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578 Sometimes a feud develops between two villages originating perhaps in some trivial incident now completely forgotten in the passage of time, but the principle is always the same: some injustice, real or imaginary, was suffered by one individual at the hands of another and such a thing can never be permitted to go unrequited. Reprisals follow from one side and the other, and a bitter rivalry springs up between the respective villages of the original antagonists, trouble breaks out periodically resulting in a little blood-letting and a few cracked skulls on both sides, police are 689 called in to restore order and to whisk the offenders off to prison, the village responsible for the breach of the peace is fined a number of cattle and both sides settle down to an uneasy truce until the next outbreak.

Such an antagonism exists between Detwok and its neighbour Pabiu. The quarrel originated over half a century ago when one village or the other—I could never discover which—destroyed or damaged or in some way desecrated the war drum of the other. The bitterness between the two villages grew with the passage of the years and there were

occasional outbreaks of fighting. An incident which might 578
have had serious consequences occurred in 1940, shortly 628
after I had arrived at Detwok. The young bloods of Detwok, after a merry evening of drinking and dancing, thought to round off a perfect day with a raid on the ladies of Pabiu. All good fun and high spirits, but the men of Pabiu, not unnaturally, objected to their daughters and sisters being taken for a midnight stroll, and the father of one girl stabbed her aggressor in the throat. The attackers, suddenly sobered by this serious end to their pranks, retreated to their own village, carrying their wounded companion. The drum was sounded, the village roused and the men armed themselves for the raid that Pabiu might make on them for the insult offered to its womenfolk, or for the attack that they would most surely launch on Pabiu should the wounded man die. Fortunately tragedy was averted by the good sense of the chief of Detwok. Knowing that he would be unable to
restrain his angry subordinates if the man did die, he sent 797
a runner to the mission for medical assistance and another 625
to Kodok for the police. Mother R. immediately went to Detwok and by prompt first aid saved the wounded warrior's life and the two villages a great amount of extra trouble and grief. The arrival of the police in the morning and the removal of the originators of the mischief restored peace, at least temporarily, to the neighbourhood.

Later the same year, the Assistant District Commissioner 578
chanced to drop in at Detwok. His visit was most unfortu- 628
nate from the village's point of view, for he found a couple 648
of Sudanese witch doctors plying a brisk trade with, not 634
merely the connivance, but the positive approval of the chief. He and the medicine men were promptly arrested and he was deposed from his chieftainship. He had been not merely chief of Detwok but the District chief, and now, to the chagrin of all true Detwokians, that coveted honour was transferred to Pabiu.

The year 1943 gave Detwok fresh cause for resentment 578
and a fresh longing for revenge over their hated rivals. The 628
rains had failed and the mid-year food shortage was even 731
648

578 more severe than usual. The government set up a grain
628 distribution centre at Pabiu, since it was the chief village
737 of the district. Pabiu waxed fat and rejoiced; Detwok
snarled in anger and groaned with hunger and metaphori-
648 cally tightened its belt and longed for the day when it would
triumph over its arrogant rival.

Two years later, in September 1945, things boiled up
again, and I thought that bloodshed on a large scale was
unavoidable. A dance was being held at Pabiu and, since
for a long time peace had reigned between the two villages,
the people from Detwok attended. I usually permitted the
535 schoolboys to go to these harmless afternoon dances, and
was horrified when they came streaming back an hour before
the usual time, crying that fighting had broken out and that
men had been killed. There were boys from both Detwok
and Pabiu attending the school and these, fearing that the
mission would be raided during the night by one side or the
other, refused to stay there and fled to the sanctuary of their
homes and the protection of the spears of their fathers and
brothers. Fortunately, things were not as bad as they
appeared at first. People from all the surrounding villages
535 attend these frequent dances, and among those enjoying
themselves on this happy afternoon were the people from
Alel, a large village three miles south of Detwok. During
the dance a man from Detwok came face to face with one
from Alel who, it seemed, had in company with his friends
waylaid the Detwokian some time previously and beaten
him up. Excited by the dancing, the Detwok warrior,
suddenly confronted by his enemy, could not restrain himself. His spear flashed and the other man fell wounded.
Immediately there was uproar. Alel was by way of being
allied to Pabiu, and the two villages promptly joined forces
against Detwok. A scrimmage ensued during which blows
were struck and a few spear wounds were inflicted, but only
one man—from Detwok—was seriously wounded. In the
face of superior numbers Detwok had to withdraw, followed
by the taunts of the victors, but swearing revenge. Two days
of tension followed during which the Sisters were kept busy

tending the hurts of the wounded. It seemed that the affair 578
had ended; the boys began to creep back to school and we 628
breathed freely again. The next morning, however, there
was a fresh alarm. One of our Christians ran breathlessly
into the mission and begged me to send at once to Kodok
for assistance and to go myself to Pabiu to stop what might
develop into a battle royal. It appeared that Alel was to
hold a dance that afternoon and Pabiu was going to attend
in force. To do so they must necessarily pass Detwok, and
the braves of that village swore that they would do so only
over their dead bodies, and that if they attempted it, Detwok
would strew the road with their corpses. To this Pabiu
joyfully replied that it would enjoy the task of putting
Detwok in its proper place, under the earth, once and for all.

I immediately sent a runner to Kodok and after lunch, for
if I was going to suffer martyrdom I thought there was no
sense in doing so on an empty tummy, I went forth to try
and keep the Pax Britannica till what time others, more
competent, could arrive to enforce it. I went first to Pabiu, 578
and found the warriors happily preparing for the dance. 628
Faces were being carefully painted, bodies oiled and 535
smothered in red dust, dancing skins being donned and all the 302
paraphernalia so dear to the Shilluk heart and so essential to
the Shilluk dance ready at hand; bells, shells, bracelets, 301
beads, strips of gaudy cloth—anything indeed that could provide
a riot of sound and colour; but I saw too that spears
were being carefully sharpened and polished, and the large
war shields not usually carried on the occasion of an ordinary
dance had been brought out.

I approached the groups and received and returned the 578
usual greetings. I asked them if there was a dance on and 628
they replied that they were going to a dance at Alel. I pointed
out that it would be more prudent if they stopped at home
and that it was asking for trouble if they encroached on
Detwok's territory. To this they replied that they were going
to dance and that if Detwok wanted to start anything, that
was Detwok's affair and not theirs. Then I went to the chief,
and told him that I had sent to Kodok for police and that

578 628 he had better restrain his young men before something happened that they would all be sorry for. He said that he could not prevent them from going to a dance, that they did not intend to molest anybody, but that they had a right to defend themselves if anyone attacked them. For an hour I argued, pleaded, cajoled and threatened, but without success. Then to my relief the chief proposed a solution that might satisfy everybody. He could not prevent his underlings from going to the dance, he said, but if there was no dance there would be no point in going. Could I stop Alel from holding the dance? I agreed to try and was about to depart when a messenger arrived from Alel to say that the dance was off. It appeared that my runner to Kodok had called at Alel on his way and had told the villagers where he was going and why. They, prudently wishing not to become involved in the Detwok-Pabiu dispute more deeply than they were already, called the affair off. The day was saved and we all breathed freely once more.

For the past several years there has been no incident of note between the two villages, but one never knows when an act of 'justice' or 'injustice' on one side or the other will cause a new flare up.

578 628 648 Poor Detwok! Poor Pabiu! Poor old Shilluk. He only wants to be left alone to mete out his own type of 'justice', as his forefathers did before the interfering foreigners came into his country. But he knows that should he raise his stick to bring it down with a satisfying thud on his enemy's head or plunge his spear into his body, a wrathful District Commissioner will swoop down on him and, figuratively speaking, will take him by the shoulders and shake him until his teeth rattle.

CHAPTER VIII

RELIGION

It is so easy to suppose, when speaking of the peoples who 776
live in the continent of Africa as pagan, that they are
without any religion at all and have no knowledge or
recognition of God. Yet it is absolutely untrue of them all.
Certainly among the Shilluk people there is not one, no
matter how remote from Christian influence, who would
not willingly subscribe to the first article of the Creed: 'I
believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and
earth.' He does indeed believe in God, the Supreme Omnipotent
Spirit, Creator of all things, Lord of life and death,
the great Jwok-Atang. I once commenced instructing a
dying Shilluk chief by asking him 'Do you believe in God?'
He looked at me in wonder that I should ask so foolish a
question, and replied 'Of course I do. All men believe in
God.' And undoubtedly, to the Shilluk, God is very real.
On entering a village, you are greeted in His name, '*Yi kall* 576
yi Jwok,' i.e. 'God has brought you.' As you leave you are
sped on your way with a prayer, '*Yi mith yi Jwok*.' 'May God
guard you.' A person looking very seedy and sorry for himself
will come and tell you that 'he has God', by which you
immediately understand not that he has experienced a 753
sudden religious conversion, but that he is sick. So too, good
fortune and misfortune both are attributed to God, and of
the latter, even the most crushing ones, the failure of the
crops, the decimation of the cattle through plague, the 731
death of a loved one through sickness or accident, although
grieved over, are accepted resignedly as coming from God.

Yet here there is a great paradox, for although God is
acknowledged by the Shilluk as the Lord of all things, and
His name is so frequently invoked, yet He is not worshipped
by the people and to Him no prayer or sacrifice is offered. 782

776 God is considered as being far off, aloof from mankind,
caring nothing for the things He has created. Men do not
then approach Him directly, nor, at least on great public
[782] occasions, presume to offer sacrifice to Him. Approach to
God can only be made through the great mediator, Nyikang.
It is Nyikang who, though he led his people into and
left them in so sorry a plight, is reverenced as the Father
and Saviour of the Shilluk people, is worshipped as a demi-god,
[775] and is thought of as always dwelling among them in
the person of the reigning king. To him are all prayers
[782] made and sacrifices offered; in his honour sacred dances are
[778] performed. His numerous shrines, located in different parts
of the country in which his spirit is believed to dwell, are
[793] carefully tended by the Bang Reth, to whom fall the perquisites
of the meat of the sacrifices and the tributes of grain
willingly surrendered from a meagre harvest in the sacred
name of Nyikang.

776 The king, as the personification, as it were, of Nyikang
643 on earth, will offer the principal sacrifices on important
782 occasions during the year, for example, to obtain a plentiful
[789] rainfall and a bumper harvest, for the averting of the plague
of weaver birds which descend on the country in their
[731] millions each year and devour the ripening grain, in times
of drought and flood, of epidemic among the people and
plague which is carrying off the cattle. On these and similar
occasions is Nyikang invoked and sacrifice offered to him by
[634] the king himself and the district chiefs, and yet it is clearly
understood by all that it is not Nyikang himself who will
bestow the benefit or avert the disaster, but God, moved to
clemency by the intercession of Nyikang for his people. And
so the second and last article of the Shilluk Creed would run
'and in Nyikang, Son of God, Father of the Shilluk people,
and our only intercessor with God for us'.

775 Alongside the cult of Nyikang, there is also a cult of the
769 dead. The Shilluk have only a vague notion of life after
death in the Christian sense. They do, indeed, speak of the
Pa Jwok, God's country, which is the abode of Nyikang and
their ancestors, and which is reached only after months of

difficult and weary travel, but they are hazy as to what 775
kind of life is led in that country and suppose it to be but a 769
continuation of the kind of life they know on this earth.
Meanwhile the spirits which have not yet started on the
journey to Pa Jwok hover round their graves and former
homesteads and may do harm to their living relations, and
a person who has died in enmity with anyone is greatly to
be feared by his late enemy. All these spirits, therefore, have 782
to be placated by offerings and sacrifices. Someone may be
taken ill, and the anxious relatives call in the witch doctor 753
to tell them which spirit is responsible for bringing this evil 755
upon them. He consults his oracle, such as an empty cala- 787
bash to which he listens intently, and then informs the
people that Nyikang says such-and-such a one, recently dead,
is responsible and that sacrifice and prayer must be offered
to his spirit, and perhaps intercession and sacrifice is to be
made at the grave of the sick person's dead father, that his
spirit may prevail upon the malignant one to remove the
curse from his family. Accordingly a sheep is led to the grave 825
of the person to be placated. The right ear is cut off and
washed in water and the water poured over the grave. 782
Prayer is made both to God, Jwok-Atang (on such private
occasions as this without the intercession of Nyikang), and to
the dead person. Then the sheep is killed and the meat
cooked. Some of the soup is poured over the grave and the 362
meat is then eaten by those who have taken part in the
sacrifice.

All former kings, and in some cases great chiefs, have 778
their shrines. These shrines consist of two or three huts 346
built in the usual Shilluk fashion but with much better 776
thatching than that affected by the ordinary Shilluk and
enclosed within a reed or thorn fence. As befitting the great 417
spirit that dwells within, these shrines are kept in good 358
repair and spotlessly clean by the duly appointed guardians.
One such shrine is situated just a few hundred yards from
the mission at Detwok. It consists of two large huts sur-
rounded by a fence and is dedicated to Nyala, a woman,
surprisingly enough. She was the daughter of the seventeenth 778
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778 king, Kudit, and during her father's reign assisted him by
776 her very able administration of the northern province of the
kingdom. She continued in this office until her death which
took place during the reign of Kudit's successor, Aney. To
[731] this shrine in times of severe drought, or on the occasion of
some other such public misfortune, comes the whole populace
[782] of the district to dance and sing and pray before it, to
offer its tithes of grain, and to slay and sacrifice a bull to the
spirit of Nyala.

793 The Shilluk do not possess a priesthood in the sense of a
782 body of men dedicated to offer sacrifice; sacrifice may be
offered publicly by the king or the chief of a district, or
privately by any individual. There are, however, individuals
756 who claim to have supernatural powers, to be possessed by
754 Nyikang and to be the interpreters of his wishes, to foretell
the future, to read auguries, to heal the sick, to avert or to
cause evil. These people are of two kinds, the *Ajwogo*—
literally, the 'man of God'—and the *Jal yath*, the 'medicine
man'. The ajwogo deals in white magic, that is, his works
756 are, or are supposed to be, beneficial to the community or
755 the individual on behalf of whom his services are solicited.
For a fee of a sheep or a goat or a cow, according to his
rapacity and the circumstances of his client, he will do his
best to cure or to kill a sick person that he has been called
in to attend. For he will cheerfully administer a potion concocted
of ingredients the potentialities of which, either for
good or ill, he hasn't the slightest idea; will indulge in
[757] blood-letting to an extent that would make an eighteenth-century
leech blench with horror; and is not above performing
a surgical operation, despite his complete ignorance of
anatomy and surgery, with a rusty piece of iron, or a spear
head or some other such Shilluk equivalent of the scalpel
and lancet. At Detwok a lovely, high-spirited cheerful girl
was reduced to a physical wreck after her ordeal at the hands
of one of these wretches. She became ill and was attended
by the Sisters who thought that she should go to hospital.
Her pagan parents refused to allow this and instead called

in an ajwogo to cure her. He diagnosed her illness, which 756
actually was pneumonia, as an evil spirit inside her, and 755
proceeded to release it by gouging a hole in her side with a
broken and rusty scissors blade. It was due only to the care
that the poor girl received from the indignant nuns that
she was saved at all, and fully two months after her 'operation'
she had not completely recovered the use of her limbs,
and was reduced to crawling round the village on her hands
and knees.

Fortunately, the people are coming to realize the good 757
that proper medical treatment can do them. They are more 756
willing to send to the local medical dispensary for assistance 177
and, if necessary, to allow the Medical Assistant or us at the
mission to send their sick into Malakal hospital. On this
account the influence of the ajwogo as a general practitioner
is being weakened and it will be greatly to the benefit of the
Shilluk when it is destroyed altogether.

The other disciple of Nyikang, the jal yath, is a dabbler 754
in black magic, a worker of evil. For a fee, he will undertake
to bring about the death or the illness of an enemy, or an
injury to his crops or cattle. Often enough the evil effects he
does cause will be brought about by the old-fashioned 278
method of poison, but to impress his client he will have
recourse to the childish practice of making an image of the
intended victim and sticking nails in it to demonstrate the
pains he is to suffer, or causing it to waste away, when the
sufferer's body will waste in a similar manner. The jal yath 685
is undoubtedly greatly feared by the people and plays upon
their fears to achieve his end. An instance of this occurred 754
at Detwok some years ago. We employ a number of youths 797
at the mission as gardeners, cowherds, kitchen and table 464
boys, etc. One of this little community, the gardener, was
the proud possessor of a wooden box in which he could keep
his few possessions under lock and key. Since he was the only
one thus blessed, the other boys used to entrust their savings 454
to him, each keeping his modest sum, ranging from a few
piastres to a pound or so, in a tobacco tin in the wooden box.
One day it was discovered that the box had been opened

685 and that one of the tins containing ninety piastres (about
754 18*s.*) had been stolen. The District Chief was called and held
[634] solemn court on the verandah of the house. He, however,
[692] could not discover the thief and therefore gave judgment
that the owner of the box was responsible for the safety of
the money entrusted to him and that he was to refund the
missing money and to be held in custody until he did so.
This seemed rather unfair on Henry, the owner of the box,
since he had gained nothing from acting as banker to the
rest, yet unless the thief was found there was nothing that
we could do about the matter and it seemed to be closed.
Two days later we were surprised to learn that one of the
boys had owned up to the theft and had refunded the
money. We were pleased, too, because we thought that
although the boy had acted meanly in stealing his companion's
savings, at least he had been man enough to come
forward to save Henry from having to pay the penalty for
the theft. We were speedily disillusioned as to his motive for
confessing; the other boys knew perfectly well that Henry
was innocent of taking the money, and they had a very
strong idea who had. Accordingly they subscribed to buy a
sheep which was given to the local witch doctor as a fee for
[626] finding the thief. The jal yath let it be known that he would
sacrifice the sheep at a certain hour, and the moment the
[789] animal died so would the culprit; the latter had not the
[152] courage to defy the curse but promptly confessed his guilt.

When an animal is slain in sacrifice, great importance is
782 attached to the position in which it falls. If the animal is a
787 bull, it is not usually slain outright, but wounded by a spear
825 thrust and allowed free. If it should wander towards the
river or towards the shrine before it dies, that is taken as a
sign that the sacrifice is acceptable to Nyikang. So, too, is it
taken as a good omen if the beast in collapsing falls on its
left side; if it should fall on its right side then the portents
are unfavourable, and should it fall neither to right nor left
but simply crumple up and fall forward with forefeet
doubled beneath it, that would presage some terrible disaster.
The actual spearing of the victim is generally done by

a Bareth of the shrine before which the sacrifice is made. 782
The king or chief who is present and who dedicates the 787
offering stands by and leads public prayer to Nyikang for 825
the blessing sought. The meat of the sacrifice is eaten by all 262
present with special perquisites for the Bareth guardian of 793
the shrine. Care is taken when cutting up the meat not to
break any bones. These are collected and thrown into the
Nile. The horns are stuck in the ground in front of the shrine, 237
and the skin, scraped and cleaned, remains in the shrine as
a mat for the spirit that dwells therein.

When the new corn is cut, tithes are given to Nyikang. 243
Part of these belong to the Bareth and the remainder is 782
ground into flour and made into a thin porridge which is
poured on to the ground in front of and inside the shrine as
a libation to the residing spirit.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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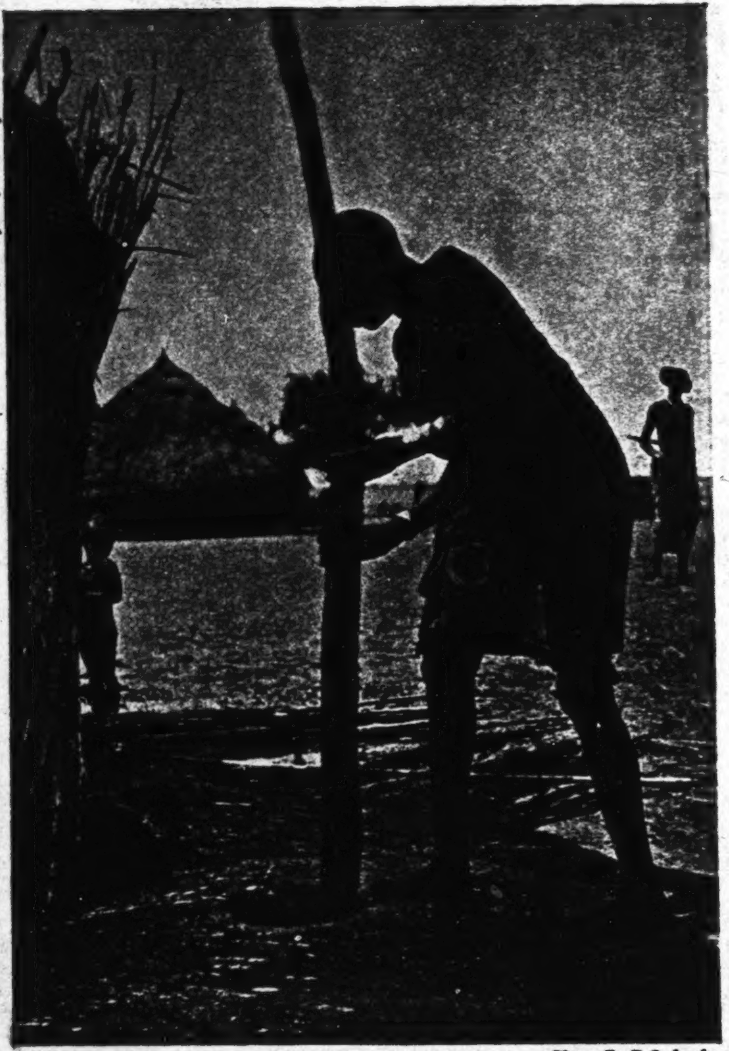

Photo: Fr. F. [illegible]

Girl pounding grain as a preliminary to grinding
[facing p. 84]

Chapter IX

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS

796 I suppose that nowhere in the world do the important
events which the newspapers group together under this
heading go without some kind of celebration to mark them.
The Shilluk are in this no exception to the rest of mankind.
The importance of these occasions in human life and in the
life of the tribe are recognized by them and made the occasion
of traditional ceremonies, elaborate sometimes and
exacting. Especially does the birth of the first-born child call
[844] for celebration, since by proving the fertility of the marriage
it gives hope of the founding of a new family and the continuance
of the tribe.

000 As the time for the arrival of the first-born draws near any
young married couple of whatever race or country is filled
with conflicting emotions of hope and fear, assurance and
doubt, joyful anticipation and misgiving. In communities
more sophisticated than the Shilluk, the young expectant
mother and her friends spend many happy hours making or
purchasing the multitude of garments in which it is considered
essential that a baby should be swathed, whilst the
anxious father-to-be treats his wife as though she were some
844 delicate and rare piece of china. The Shilluk have their own
very decided ideas about the place of the husband during
this very important function of the birth of the first child.
It cannot be tolerated that he should be continually in the
way of busy women during, and for a considerable period
before and after, this time, so he must keep his distance, the
distance being that between his village and that of his wife's
[591] parents from which he brought her at the time of their
marriage. Custom decrees that about the sixth month of her
843 pregnancy the young Shilluk wife must leave her husband's
roof and 'go home to mother'. Father is callously left to

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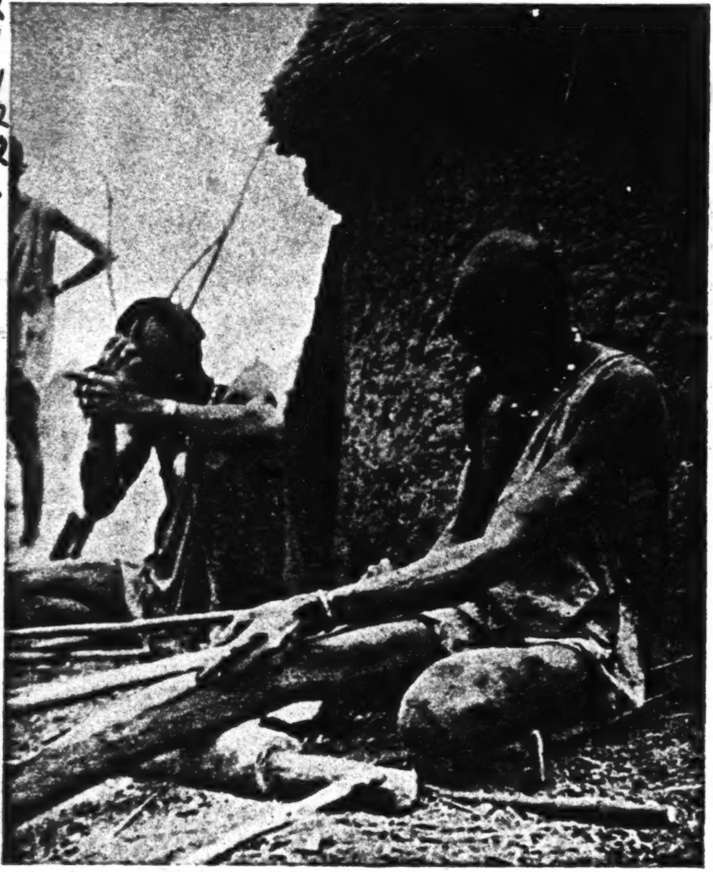

Photo: Fr. F. Spekemaker

A Shilluk putting the finishing touches to a spear-shaft

[facing p.85]

fend for himself during the intervening months, and he 843
spends the time drinking bowls of beer and smoking pipes of
rank tobacco with his cronies, discussing the many complexities
of women and particularly that formidable mother-in-law
of his whom he may never visit, may never even meet, 606
even going to the length of turning aside from her path and
averting his head should he chance to see her on the road.
He dreams up, too, rosy dreams of his daughter, for it is 842
always a daughter of course, who will be the apple of his
eye and the pride of his life during her childhood and who
will bring in many heads of fat cattle when she becomes of
marriageable age.

On the day of the birth, a custom, of interest to all, but 851
fraught with a certain amount of apprehension and anxiety 836
to some, takes place. Before the mother is given her baby to
nurse she must name publicly all her former lovers. Failure
to do so, it is averred, will result in the death of the child, and 626
should she refuse to confess she would not be given the baby
at all, but it would be reared by a foster-mother. It may be 608
that the girl can say with honesty that she has had no prenuptial
amours, and that up to the time of her marriage
she had preserved her virginity intact. Since the general
character of such a girl would be fairly well known in her
own village, her word would be accepted and she would be
given the child. But if perchance the infant should die, it 626
would be taken as a sign that she had lied. Unfortunately
such paragons of virtue among Shilluk maidenhood are 787
rather rare, and the term 'virgin' applied to a nubile girl
has something of an unmeaning character, useful only in distinguishing
her from her married sisters. Nobody then is in
the least shocked or surprised when the girl recites a number
of names of men with whom she has been before her
marriage.

The men thus accused may either admit the charge or 851
indignantly deny it. If a man admits his transgression he 684,
must pay the outraged husband three sheep or goats, or, if 695
he is the father of the child just born, three cows. If he
denies the accusation he undergoes a variation of 'trial by

851 ordeal'. He brings a sheep to the village where the girl is;
684 a corner of the animal's ear is cut off and the piece put into
695 a bowl of water and the man, the girl and the baby are
825 sprinkled with the resultant blood and water. If by the
following morning the child is still alive the man is adjudged
787 to have lied and must pay compensation as above. If, however, the baby should die during the night, then the girl is held to have accused the man falsely.

851 During the reign of King Kur, whose despotic methods of
684 government resulted in his being removed from office, a
695 much grimmer and more realistic trial by ordeal was enacted.
178 The man and the girl were brought to a channel of the Nile
where a large crocodile habitually dwelt. By some means
643 this brute was called up from the depths and the pair placed
825 equidistant from it were made to swim across the channel, or, if they could not swim, were launched on flimsy rafts. The one that the crocodile seized was deemed to be guilty of lying. It is on record that one youth about to be put to the test in this manner protested thus, 'I know that I am innocent all right, but how does the crocodile know that?'

846 After the proceedings of the naming and the trying of the
852 lovers is concluded, the mother is allowed to have her child.
If it should be a boy, the father, who has been informed of
553 the birth and sex of the child though as yet he is not allowed to see him, sends a present of a miniature harpoon, presumably indicative of his desire that his son should grow up to be a mighty hunter of hippopotami. Then a small basket is
852 woven and filled with ashes of burnt cow dung. One of the
604 baby's maternal uncles hangs the basket round his waist calling upon Nyikang to bless the child and to make him a good husbandman. (The basket containing the ashes represents the large family basket filled with grain.) He then walks round the hut where the baby is, beats upon the wall with the basket and then throws it into the road. If the child is a girl the ashes are mixed with water and the uncle makes models of a bull and a cow. Nyikang's blessing is invoked upon the child that at her marriage she may command a good

dowry. The models are hung up in front of the hut and the 852
ceremony is concluded with beer-drinking. 604

About a month later the child may be taken home to be 846
shown to its father. The mother carrying the infant is accompanied
by three or four girl friends and the old woman who 851
attended her at the confinement. The father and his male 852
relatives and friends inspect the baby outside the hut to
satisfy themselves that it shows no deformity or any other 847
abnormality. If such unhappily were the case, the child
would be enclosed together with a live sheep in a basket and 825
thrown into the Nile. When the father is satisfied that the
child is normal, a goat or sheep is killed, the meat eaten at 574
the ensuing feast and the skin scraped and softened to serve
as a sleeping mat for the baby. Beer is prepared and the 854
whole village invited to come to the party. Those who come,
however, are expected to bring some small gifts of money, 431
beads, bracelets and the like. These are the perquisites of
the midwife, the beer makers and the girls who escorted the
mother and child back to her home.

There are no special ceremonies for the birth of children 852
after the first born, and the mother may or may not return 843
to her father's village for her confinements as she pleases.
There is however a little feast to celebrate the birth and, as 574
before, a sheep or goat is killed and the skin used as the 854
infant's sleeping mat.

During a woman's pregnancy neither she nor her husband 843
is permitted to visit anyone who is sick. They are considered 758
to be unlucky and their visit to a sick person would surely
result in his death. The most that is allowed is that they may 574
stand at the fence surrounding the house where the sick 777
person is and enquire after him.

With reference to the custom of the young wife leaving 843
her husband's home for her father's for the birth of her first 644
child, it must be mentioned that the wives of the king, not
merely on the occasion of their first born, but for all subsequent
confinements, must leave Fashoda. They do not go to
their former home, however, but to the village of some chief
at a considerable distance from the capital. The child that is 644
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644 [608] born there is brought up in that village under the tutelage of the chief. If the child is a boy he is brought up in much the same manner as other boys of the village but it is not forgotten that he is a Nyireth, and consequently a potential king. He is given a herd of cattle, and on reaching manhood is expected to found his own village, also at a distance from [669] Fashoda, for the fear of assassination is always present to the reth, and hence it is ever the royal policy to keep all the princes as far distant from Fashoda as possible.

* * *

581 583 Marriage is an important affair, not only for those directly concerned, but for the whole community, for among the Shilluk it has many economic implications arising chiefly from the condition of the dowry or bride-price, almost universal throughout Africa. When the Shilluk youth, decorated 584 in his best, goes a-wooing, if the lady of his choice accepts the heart and fortune which he casts at her feet and coyly says yes, she is sure to say that he must 'see father first'. I presume that an English youth in similar happy circumstances would address his prospective father-in-law thus: 'Sir, I wish to marry your daughter. She has done me the honour of promising to be my wife,' and with a brief discussion of present security and future prospects, the matter would be quickly settled. Not so does the Shilluk bridegroom-to-be approach his future in-laws; he does not appear in person, but sends one or two friends to negotiate the marriage for him. Nor must the ambassador come empty-handed, but must bring the traditional gifts as befitting the occasion; spears, hoes, tobacco and firewood for the father and mother of the girl and, as the negotiations proceed, upwards of seven sheep which become the property of her brother or cousins, and finally, and most important of all, the cattle.

583 The bride-price of ten or more head of cattle is an essential condition for every Shilluk marriage. It may be paid in instalments and indeed generally is, and its payment usually extends over several years, but there can can be no question of the young couple living together as husband and wife

until at least seven cows have been paid. When that number 583
has been safely gathered into the family byre, the love-lorn
swain may indeed claim his blushing bride, but if after
that the payment of the remainder be unduly delayed, the
indignant father and the male relatives of the lady will not
hesitate to carry her off to her former home till what time
the final instalments are forthcoming, or even, if there is
little or no prospect of the debt being speedily paid, of
offering her anew to one more likely to fulfil his obligations.

But even when the last cow has been handed over; when 583
the somewhat bewildered ox, garlanded and decorated, has 585
been escorted to the bride's village by a cheering and singing
mob of the bridegroom's friends; when the mock battle has
taken place during which the bride's party endeavours to
and eventually succeeds in wresting the cow from the hands
of the groom's partisans; when they in turn have stormed
the paternal stronghold, and carrying off the lady have
delivered her into the arms of her ever-loving husband;
when the last dance has been danced and the final bumper
quaffed, still the young husband's bovine anxieties are not
completely at rest. A murrain might sweep the land and 583
claim one or more of his cattle among its victims, and the 586
law demands that they be replaced, or else he may find 686
himself a grass widower. And if perchance the replacements
should die, then others must be forthcoming within a
reasonable period of time, that the total may be kept complete.
Failure to comply with these demands may mean that
the District Chief may order that the unhappy man's wife
and children 'be sold and payment be made'. This quite
literally happened at Detwok; a man had been married for
ten years and had three children; he had paid only seven
head of cattle and of these three had died, so that he still owed
six. His family was taken from him and given to another
man who was able to pay the required cattle. Fortunately,
in this case the mission was able to step in. It was a Christian 797
family and the marriage had been solemnized in church
according to the requirements of both God and the Government.
The priest told the chief that he could not ruthlessly

583 break up a Christian family in that manner, and that if the
586 woman and children were not returned to their home within
686 three days, the matter would be taken to the king. Happily
797 we were on safe ground in threatening this. A short time before there had been a similar case in Lul where a Christian family was concerned and the Fathers had protested successfully to the king, who ordered the family to be returned. The chief, hearing this, gave in gracefully and the woman and children were brought back.

583 And what of the happy father of the bride? Does he
602 assume the airs and authority of a cattle baron at thus being enriched by ten cows? Poor old father, alas, will be fortunate if he gets one or two of the dowry to call his own. He does, indeed, as befitting his dignity as head of the family, receive the cattle, but the same family will take very good care that they do not remain long in the paternal shippon. He probably has growing sons hungry for cattle to build up their own dowries, but if it should happen that the Lord has not blessed him with male issue, his own unmarried brothers will clamour for their share; his wife's strident voice will be heard advancing the claims of her brothers; uncles and nephews and in-laws will take up the cry, some in strong, others in less certain terms according to their proximity to or remoteness from the immediate family circle, and the dispute will continue until the final settlement is made and the cows are dispersed to the remotest parts of the land. One thing is sure, and that is that if anyone suffers from the division of the spoils it will be father. In the course of a
231 few years the cattle of a dowry will have changed hands several times, having been split up and absorbed into other herds, again and again handed over as part of a bride-price, and again and again finding new owners among some girl's relatives, ranging the length and breadth of the Shilluk country and back again, shifting and changing, being collected and dispersed, only to be collected and dispersed again. And so it will go on until an individual cow is deemed no longer worthy of inclusion in a dowry, when it will be sold for butcher's meat or slaughtered for a wedding or a

funeral or some such occasion calling for special feasting. 231
It would tax the ingenuity of a European to devise a system, and keep a battery of clerks in constant employment and a filing cabinet in constant use to keep an up-to-date check on the wanderings of the various animals of any one bride-herd. Not so with the simple Shilluk however. Inside his woolly head—admittedly not particularly concerned with any- [181]
thing that does not pertain to cattle—he keeps all the details of each individual cow in his herd. He knows all their comings in and goings out, all their risings up and their sittings down. Each cow has a special and distinctive colour and each colour a special and distinctive name and he knows them all and can describe them in detail. He can tell you offhand the life history of any cow; its previous owners as it passed from dowry to dowry eventually to become a member of his, and when he has parted with it, he follows its subsequent career with unflagging interest, can name the various people who have had it since it left his ownership and knows just where it can be found at any given time.

Our young benedict is now happily married and settled 593
down to a life of connubial bliss. But among the Shilluk, as among their more sophisticated Western brethren, the course of true love does not always run smooth. The lady, who in the eyes of her lord is a mere chattel, something that he has bargained and paid for, must prove that she is up to standard. [562]
Not indeed that a Shilluk wife becomes the absolute slave of her husband, bearing all the burdens of the day and the heats, while he passes the rest of his days in slothful idleness. Far from it. Both have their recognized duties and one will assist the other should occasion call for it; thus the wife will [462]
at times assist her husband with the planting, weeding and reaping, whilst he does not consider it beneath his dignity to nurse the baby while his spouse is making the daily trip to the river for water, or to sit for hours monotonously agitating a gourd of milk in the hope that eventually it will turn into butter. But the primary duty of a Shilluk wife is to become a 586
Shilluk mother, and if perchance she proved to be barren

586 she would be ignominiously bundled off home. The husband, like an indignant customer who has made an unsatisfactory purchase, would demand his dowry back. The girl's
578 family would strenuously resist the claim and a long and acrimonious dispute would follow. The husband might
692 attempt to recover his cattle by force, and eventually the case would be settled by the Reth's court; a compromise would be reached, judgment would be given for the plaintiff, but one or two cows would remain with the girl's family, and so would the unfortunate girl herself. Similarly, should the young bride die childless, the contract is deemed not to have been fulfilled, and the husband will demand that the bride wealth be returned to him. If the lady, faithless jade, should leave her lawful spouse for another man, the outraged husband does not leap up in righteous anger, seize his spear, pursue the erring couple and demand satisfaction of the seducer of his wife's affections, but he does make a bee-line for his father-in-law's kraal, and in the height of his wrath will demand not only the cattle, but also the sheep, spears and hoes and all the other little trinkets and knick-knacks with which he won the family's good graces during time of courtship. Father, anxious to keep the peace and the cattle,
587 may offer his irate son-in-law another charming daughter, if he has one handy, as a substitute for the fickle one. But if such a useful article as a second daughter of marriageable age is lacking, or the husband, feeling that his matrimonial adventures in that particular family have gone far enough, should refuse the hand of the second lady, then father with a sigh will have to set about the difficult task of making his reluctant relatives give up their respective shares of the dowry and, at the same time, the equally difficult task of getting another dowry from his new son-in-law.

797
581 In Detwok a boy was being examined in the Catechism prior to his baptism. The subject under discussion was the Sacraments and their division into those which may be received only once and those which may be repeated. All went well until the subject of Matrimony was reached. 'How often can a person receive the Sacrament of Matri-

mony?' asked the priest. 'Once,' promptly answered the 797
catechumen, and then cautiously amended his answer, 'per- 581
haps twice.' 'Oh,' said the Father, 'why only twice?' 'If a man marries and his wife dies, he can marry again, can't he?' 'Ye-es,' conceded the boy, 'he can marry again.' 'And if that second wife dies,' continued the Father, 'can't he marry a third time?' 'No,' said the boy. 'Why not?' 'Because he has no cows left' was the triumphant and conclusive reply. And that fairly well sums up the Shilluk's attitude towards matrimony. In common with the rest of 595
his African brethren he is by inclination polygamous. In 554
Africa nothing adds more to one's prestige than a multiplicity of wives. Fortunately, however, from our—the Catholic missionaries'—standpoint the tribe as a whole is of necessity monogamous. Except in the case of wealthy chiefs [556]
or fathers who rejoice in a quiverful of daughters to bring cattle into the family byre and no sons to take them out, the people generally are too poor to be able to scrape together the necessary cattle to provide for a second wife.

When a man dies his wife is not thereby released from her 587
matrimonial obligations and free either to re-marry or to re- [589]
main a widow. She is, as has been said, something that has been bought and paid for, part of the dead man's property, and is inherited together with the rest of his effects. If she is not the mother of the deceased's eldest son he will claim her, or if she is his mother or there is no son, or none old enough to marry, she will be taken by her brother-in-law or some other member of her husband's family. She belongs to that family and must remain in it to fulfil her duties as a wife and a mother to some member of it. If it so happened that there were no relative, no matter how remote, of her husband who could inherit her, then she might marry again outside it, but only on condition that a dowry is forthcoming to compensate her husband's family.

* * *

A death among the Shilluk is the signal for an outburst of 763
wailing on the part of the women. It is a high, shrill, screaming

763 sound that is prolonged for about ten minutes and is renewed at intervals during the day as relatives or friends of the deceased arrive for the funeral.

[766] I have said previously that the Shilluk are fond of wandering from their own villages. They will settle and live for years at the other end of the country, perhaps among the people of another tribe or in another province. But no matter how long a man has been away from his own people, he will always endeavour to return to die among them, and if he should fall ill whilst away from home he will try to let his kinsfolk know in order that they may come and fetch him, or will have himself carried back. If, however, he should die 766 away from home the news of his death is greeted with the customary wailing, and some member of his family must visit his grave and bring back some of the earth from it; this is buried near the dead man's home and the funeral ceremonies are enacted over it as though the corpse itself were present.

761 682 [643] It is the Shilluk tradition that the king should not be permitted to die a natural death, but should be ceremoniously smothered by his womenfolk. The same is true of a chief, but whether the reasons for the killing in this case are the same as those which decide the death of the king is not clear. Certainly a chief who had been ill for a month and showed no signs of recovery would be speedily put out of the way. [888] The custom seems to extend to other cases too; an old man would be smothered as also would be one suffering from a long and painful illness, and the same is done too, in some cases at least, shortly before death would take place naturally. I myself saw a dying boy being smothered by his own mother. She propped him up between her knees and passed her hand over his nose and mouth. I thought that she was wiping away the mucus that was coming from his nose and mouth, and it was only when he had ceased to breathe that I realized to my horror that she had killed him. When questioned about the reasons for this 'mercy' killing the Shilluk are vague and evasive. They say, for instance, that it is a humiliation for anyone to die naturally.

Whatever the cause of death, burial follows at once 766
except in the case of a king, when there is a short lying in [764]
state. If the deceased is a Nyireth or a chief, he is buried
under the floor of his principal hut. A bull is killed, the meat
of which is eaten by the grave-diggers, whilst the skin is cut [767]
into strips and woven across a quickly fashioned wooden,
four-legged frame to make a bed or a bier. The body is
washed and the head shaved. Arms, neck and waist are
adorned with beads and a leopard skin fastened round
the loins. The corpse is then rolled in a new white cloth
and around this is bound a cow skin. It is then placed
on the bed with a hen under the head. Meanwhile the work [231]
of digging the grave has been going on apace. This is a very
difficult task, particularly in the dry season when the ground
is as hard as concrete. The pit made is a very large one, since
it has to accommodate the complete bier. It is taken down
to a depth of six or seven feet and then a large cavity is cut
in the side, large enough to contain the bed. The body resting
on the bier is then lowered into the grave and fitted into
the cavity. As this is being done the wailing of the women
fills the air and the men salute the dead prince or chief,
clashing their spears on their shields and singing songs in [533]
his praise. The principal wife takes two handfuls of sweepings
from the floor and, standing with her back to the grave,
throws them over her shoulders into the grave. Then she
casts in two handfuls of mud, again standing with her back
to the grave but with her hands by her sides, so that she
throws the mud behind her. After the grave is filled in, all
the mourners wash themselves in the river. They wear ropes
round their necks as a sign of mourning, shave their heads
and remove all beads and ornaments, and during the period
of mourning should abstain from dancing. Four days after
the burial the mourners gather again for the completion of
the grave. Beer has been prepared and some if it is poured
on the grave; the mound is then plastered over with mud
and neatly smoothed and finished off. A short funeral dance [535]
follows after which all the mourners partake of the remainder
of the beer.

766 The final ceremonies take place after an interval of a
month or two. Cattle, varying in number according to the
[782] eminence and wealth of the dead man's family, are driven
in for sacrifice and distribution, after being slaughtered,
among the participants. The men of the district march in,
[535] village by village, and perform the funeral dance, first encircling
the village on the outside, then saluting the tomb of
the deceased; they advance, clashing spear on shield, to
kneel on one knee before the grave, then retire and finally
encircle the village, this time on the inside, before giving
place to the next company. The whole performance is accompanied
[533] by the thudding of the drums and the chanting of
the praises of Nyikang and the dead prince. This dance concludes
all public remembrance of the dead man. No record is
made or kept of the day or month of his death and so nothing
in the nature of an anniversary ceremony takes place. The
hut under which he is buried is allowed to fall into ruins and
[778] thus forms a tumulus over the grave. The place is then made
tidy and a reed or thorn fence erected around it to preserve
it from profane use.

The household utensils of the dead man are either
burned or buried on the day of the funeral, but the rest of
768 his property, including his wives—for they are reckoned as
428 his chattels for which he paid so many head of cattle—is
inherited by his relatives according to the directions given
by the deceased. If he left no instructions for the dividing
of his goods everything belongs to his eldest son, but he is
expected to give a share to his brothers and his father's
principal male relatives, brothers and half-brothers. The
dead man's spears, his canoe and the necklace of large white
beads, a token of his dignity, belong to the eldest son
absolutely.

764 The funeral of a common Colo and the consequent cere-
[565] monies differ in some respects from those of a Nyireth. The
body is washed and shaved and adorned with beads, but
since no commoner is allowed to wear a leopard skin, the
skin of a serval cat is fastened round the loins. If the dead

person is a woman or a girl, a skirt is substituted for the 764
skin, and for the girl some strings of yellow beads are added.
If the family can afford it, it will buy a couple of yards of
white cotton cloth to serve as a winding sheet and a cow
skin is bound round this. The grave of a commoner is not
dug in the hut itself but outside, near the compound. It is
put near the surrounding reed fence, in a place where
passers-by will not walk over it. As for a chief, the grave is
excavated to a depth of about six feet but it is not nearly so
wide, since the body is not buried lying on a bier, but is
placed on the bare earth. The niche or alcove is cut out of
the side, however, and a hen is placed under the head. 231
During the funeral the mourners wail in the customary
manner, and this is the signal for the warriors, who hitherto
have been out of sight in the cattle byre, to charge forward,
armed as usual with spears and shields, to salute their dead
comrade. The grave is mudded over on the fourth day with 765
the customary beer drinking and libation over the grave, and 782
the relatives abstain for a while from dancing and the use of 535
personal adornments. 301

The mourning is not really completed, however, until the 765
deceased person has been commemorated at a funeral dance. 535
This is a strict obligation upon the relatives, even though it
may be a year or more before it is fulfilled. Since the commoner
is not sufficiently important or wealthy to be given a 527
dance all to himself, funeral dances are held periodically in 628
the principal villages. The district turns up in force for these
communal 'All Souls' days, for besides the attraction of the
dance—and any Shilluk will cheerfully walk miles just for
the pleasure of a dance—there is also the extra treat of a
share in the meat when the affair is over. Everybody who is
commemorating his dead must give an offering, a bull if the 825
deceased is a man or a woman, a sheep if a child. The dance
follows the pattern of the more important funeral dances:
There is no tomb, however, so the drums mounted in forked
sticks are made the focus of attention. The warriors, armed
with spear and shield, make the customary encirclement of
the village and then advance to the drums, chanting their

765 535 songs the while. Since this is a more modest affair than the dance for a prince or a chief, the whole company can remain in the arena during the whole afternoon. The matrons too, but not the young girls, take part in the dancing, marching in a small circle round the drums, some carrying a spear or a sword or a stick 'at the slope'.

533 There is a pause in the proceedings and a sudden hush falls on the gathering. The song maker who all the afternoon has been leading the singing with tremendous voice and energy, now stands by the stilled tom-toms and chants the names of those who are being commemorated that day. The drumming and singing, the dancing and the marching recommence and continue until about an hour before sunset. 273 765 Beer in large quantities has been prepared for the hoarse and dust-choked warriors, and as they drink, the cattle are distributed among the various villages taking part. Each beast is slaughtered near the hut of one of those whose death is the reason for the celebration, and the meat is divided by the village chiefs and portions allotted to different householders in each village. 578 As one may well imagine, the division, first of the cattle and then of the meat, is not carried out in any spirit of amity and fraternal charity, but is accompanied by much wrangling and acrimony between village and village and individual and individual.

It is dark before everybody is satisfied, or rather, has got all that he is likely to get, and the dancers, some happily bearing a bloody burden, others grumbling at the smallness of their portion, stream along the road to their homes and supper. All obligations to the dead are satisfied; may they rest in peace.

CHAPTER X

HOW THE FAITH CAME TO THE SHILLUK

797*

BY this, the patient reader should know something of the Shilluk people who inhabit this part of the Sudan, and perhaps he might now be wondering how it was that anyone thought of coming to evangelize them and how the first missions were established among them. The story takes us back more than a hundred years, to 1842, when Father Luke Monsori, an Italian Lazarist Father and companion of Blessed Justin de Jacobis, had to leave Abyssinia where missions had been established for many years, because of a persecution instigated by Abuna Salma, the head of the Coptic Church in that country.

Father Monsori made his way to Khartoum, the present capital of the Sudan, and there began a mission by building a small church and school. In July 1843 he wrote to the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda in Rome, and after describing the work he was doing, said: 'I am also thinking of opening, as soon as I have repaired the buildings, a school for the boys of the Shilluk and Galla tribes and of other tribes on the White Nile who have lately been discovered. By this means there will soon be some youths well instructed in the truths of our holy religion who will be able to serve as catechists in their own villages. We can in this way get in touch with central Africa and open a mission there.' Unfortunately, however, he returned to Abyssinia the following year and left the mission in the hands of a Father Serrao, but the latter returned to Europe in 1847 and the mission was closed.

In 1848 some priests arrived in Khartoum to re-open the mission, but within three months the Vicar Apostolic died and one of the priests, Don Vinco, had to go back to Europe to seek for help. He was a native of Verona in Northern

* 797 Italy, and at home stayed for some time in his old seminary where his description of the unhappy condition of the African negroes decided some of the students to follow him to the Sudan mission after their ordination. When Don Vinco returned to Africa he joined Mgr. Knoblecher, the new superior, on a voyage of exploration up the White Nile as far as Gondokero. Later he went back to Gondokero and founded a mission, and there he eventually died.

It was not until 1857 that the young students of the Mazza Institute, Don Vinco's old college, were ready to leave for Africa. Early in 1858 they set sail from Khartoum for Holy Cross, a mission station which had been founded not far from Gondokero. Among these young missionaries was a Veronese priest called Daniel Comboni, who wrote vivid letters home telling of their journey along this mysterious river, whose source was still undiscovered, and describing the strange birds and animals he saw on its banks. In one of these letters we hear of the Shilluk again. One night the boat ran on to a sandbank, and they could not get it off again. On the shore on one side they could see the fires of the Dinka and in the firelight the savages leaning on their great spears; on the other side of the river twelve or fifteen Shilluk canoes were tied up, their owners standing beside other fires; from both sides suspicious eyes were turned on the boat. It was easy for the missionaries to guess the thoughts that filled their minds: they were wondering if these white men were the usual slave traders who came to ravage their homes.

> Our position [wrote Comboni] was very critical; we were in the middle of the White Nile; on the one side were the Dinka who only last year had massacred the crew of a boat, on the other, the Shilluk, one of the most powerful and savage tribes of Central Africa, living by robbery and rapine. We could not move, and the ship's captain told us despondently that he did not know what to do. If those savages had wanted, they could have destroyed us in a matter of minutes. Do you know what we said? When we had discussed every side of the difficulty

> we said that if the Shilluk should come to attack us, with crucifixes on our breasts we would surrender everything to them, boat and all. Without doubt they would take us as slaves before their king, perhaps to be killed, but by the grace of God and by charity we would win the affection of those savage people, and so, without seeking any further for a place in the vineyard of Christ wherein to work, we would plant our Cross and found our mission station there. If we had been taken prisoners there and then, and carried in chains before their proud king, it might have proved the salvation of these haughty savages, but we, and perhaps they also, did not deserve such a grace.

They were not taken prisoners, but managed to get off the sandbank by their own efforts. They had paid the Shilluk to help them, but these made off as soon as they received the money and did not stay to earn it.

Eventually the Fathers arrived at Holy Cross and there built themselves some huts and a church. Soon, however, the rainy season arrived and all the missionaries became ill with malaria. One laybrother had to be sent back to Khartoum where he died, and a month after their arrival one of the priests died as well. Don Comboni suffered more than any of them and wrote that he usually had a temperature for 36 out of every 48 hours; sometimes his bouts of fever lasted four, six and even nine days on end, and from April 5th until the middle of August he was hardly ever without a high temperature. The missionaries found it very difficult to make friends with the natives, for these hated all white men, believing them to be all slave traders and responsible for their sufferings. Nine months after their coming to Holy Cross the missionaries received their first letters, but these brought such bad news of death and ill health among their fellow-workers at Khartoum, including news of the death of the Pro-Vicar himself, that, considering their own weak condition, they decided to go back to Khartoum. Arriving there, another member of the party died, and it was found necessary to send Comboni to Italy if his life was to be saved.

* 797 Comboni recovered and hoped to return to Africa, but the frequent deaths among the mission personnel caused Mgr. Kirchner to conclude that the mission could not be carried on unless it were taken over by some large Religious Order. The Franciscans accordingly accepted the task, and sent two groups to work in the mission, but so many died even before the beginning of their labours that by 1862 the mission was practically abandoned. Don Comboni had sworn to one of his dying brethren that he would not desert Africa, and he never forgot his vow. He first worked with some native boys who had been brought to Italy, hoping to be able to send them back to work among their own people, but that plan was a failure; either the Africans died during the cold winter in Italy, or were spoiled by their contact with civilization. Then he had his great idea of 'saving Africa by means of Africa'; of founding institutes around the coast in healthy positions where white men and black could live together, and in these to train catechists and teachers, and eventually priests and nuns, who could be sent inland to start missions. To effect this plan it would be necessary to send missionaries in the beginning, but they could be changed frequently so that their health would not suffer. The Pope approved of this, and Comboni toured Europe to seek help from various Societies and Institutes. Help was forthcoming in the form of funds for his work, but he could not get any Congregation to undertake to send men. Individual priests were willing to assist, and a Congregation of nuns to help him temporarily, and with this help he founded an institute in Cairo where he took in sick and destitute negroes whom he nursed to health and instructed in the faith. Cardinal Barnabo, the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda, refused to give him a mission in central Africa; 'You must either bring me a certificate stating that you will live another 35 years, or found an Institute to carry on your work,' he told him, 'otherwise I am afraid that if an accident carries you off to another world, your work will die with you.'

Under the patronage of the Cardinal Marquis of Canossa, Comboni thereupon began two Congregations, the Verona 797* Fathers and the Missionary Sisters of Verona. In May 1871 he was made Pro-Vicar of Central Africa, and on January 26th, 1873, left Cairo for Khartoum to take up residence there. He had been preceded by some of his missionaries, and immediately opened stations at Dilling, El Obeid and Berber. In 1877 he was consecrated Bishop and made Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa, but returning to Khartoum from [731] Rome he found the Sudan desolated by a terrible famine [165] which caused the death of hundreds of thousands of natives and many priests. He was thus forced to abandon his cherished project of the expansion of the mission. Dr. Matteuci, the famous explorer, wrote concerning this:

> Mgr. Comboni sees in the sad loss of nearly all his missionaries the delaying, for who knows how long, of the realization of his vast projects. In the last few months he had begun an agricultural station on the Blue Nile at Gadaref destined to have a great future; he had made arrangements for the establishment of a station at Fashoda, the capital of the Shilluk country, one of the most barbarous and unhealthy places in Central Africa, and was then preparing an expedition to the Equatorial Lakes which would have gone down in history as one of the most important achievements of Daniel Comboni.

Comboni always had in mind the poor Shilluk whom he had encountered on his journey to Holy Cross, and it was to help them that he planned to open a mission at Fashoda, but the famine postponed indefinitely this design, and the trials of the mission reached a climax with the death of the great apostle himself in 1881. It seemed that shipwreck was near, but the mission weathered the storm, only to come to grief a few months later. In 1881 the Mahdist revolt broke [175] out, and as Dilling, El Obeid and Berber fell to the Mahdi, the priests, brothers and nuns became their prisoners. Many of them died as the result of the treatment they received when they refused to deny their faith and become Moslems;

*797 others were taken to Omdurman and kept there as prisoners for ten years. The missionaries in Khartoum fled to Cairo, there to await the freeing of the Sudan by Anglo-Egyptian forces.

The revolt was suppressed in 1898, and it was only then that it became possible to carry out Mgr. Comboni's desire. In the beginning of December, 1900, Mgr. Roveggio, with Fathers Tappi and Ortwalder, left Khartoum in the mission boat *Redemptor* to explore the possibilities of founding a mission. They had decided to search in Dinka country, but the boatmen made a mistake and landed them on the Shilluk side of the river. Arriving at Fashoda, they sent a delegation to the king who answered that he would come himself to see them, but in the meantime needed a bottle of brandy as he was not well. When the king finally came on board, Mgr. Roveggio asked his permission to begin a mission among the Shilluk. The king consented and gave them a site at Tonga, far to the south. The missionaries then continued their journey to inspect the place the king had given them, and decided to accept it, but on their return they found that he had changed his mind and now wished them to settle at Lul, not far from his residence, as he thought that it would be more to his advantage to have them near at hand. On February 11th, Fathers Tappi and Huber went to live in the new mission station, the first established among the Shilluk.

*797 186 798 The beginnings of the mission were exceedingly difficult. Father Stang explained later: 'The Shilluk always speak badly of "foreigners", and despise everything which is not Shilluk, and this for two reasons: their pride in their own nation and the great suffering caused them by the Arabs and Mahdists.' The people would not go near the mission, and the old men and women kept away the curious children by telling them that the white men only wanted them as slaves, or would kill them to make poisons out of their blood. On July 7th, 1901, two of the mission huts were set on fire and only the timely arrival of Father Beduschi with supplies on July 24th saved the priests who had been left without shelter and food and tools. Ten years later the same Father wrote:

'When Father Tappi and I started the first mission among 797*
the Shilluk at Lul, they did not want us; they hated us and 186
twice attempted to kill us.' During the first few months the 798
natives twice attempted to take their lives by throwing spears at them. One of their greatest troubles was the learning of the language, a tongue absolutely unknown to Europeans. The Shilluk could not bear the thought that foreigners should learn their language and did all they could to prevent them from doing so. They answered their questions falsely, and laughed scornfully at the attempts of the missionaries to write down the strange words; twice, too, they set fire to their houses so as to destroy their work. With time this difficulty was overcome, but even when the people could understand them they refused to listen to what they had to say. 'How is it possible,' they asked, 'for there to be anything good in heaven? Even the birds come down to eat so as not to die of hunger. We Shilluk are made to eat and dance; you foolish men can have your heaven.' They ran away from men so cruel as to wear on their breasts a cross with a man
fixed to it. Alone in their mud huts, often hungry and often 797*
ill with malaria, the missionaries had only their faith and their trust in God to keep them at their posts. The health of the laybrothers became seriously impaired and yet not one Shilluk would come to work for them. To add to their troubles, the rains stopped earlier than usual that year and all their crops were ruined; the work they had done was wasted, and they were left even without seed to plant.

Little by little, however, the natives began to approach the mission, first out of curiosity to see the work the white men were doing, and then to beg, whilst the king showed his interest by sending occasionally for a bottle of brandy, some money or some other present. At the same time the missionaries began to gain a reputation as doctors and were thus able to make friends with some of the people and baptize
some children before they died. In 1903 the king deigned [643]
to visit the mission and stayed the night with the Fathers; he ordered the nearby villagers to send milk and instructed

* 797 them as to how they were to treat his friends, as he called [643] the missionaries. Conditions improved after this, and also by the arrival in June of three Sisters of Verona, with Mother Guiseppa Scandola as Superior, to assist in the mission work. When Mother Guiseppa received orders to start for Lul, one of the Sisters in Assuan told her that she envied her good fortune in going to work in the mission. 'Do not worry,' she replied, 'in four months you will come to take my place.' Soon after her arrival in Lul, Father Beduschi became very ill and was at death's door, but Mother Guiseppa, who was herself ill at the time, sent him this message: 'Have no fear, Father; you will not die, you have hard work to do for the Shilluk. I am old and useless; I shall die in your stead.' Two days later, Father Beduschi, completely recovered, gave the last Sacraments to the Sister, and she died on September 1st. Her successor as Superior was the very Sister to whom she had made the prophecy in Assuan. She was a woman remarkable for her devotion and holiness. In this [643] same year, too, the British Government deposed the king, [648] Kur, whose successor, Fadiet, was much more friendly to the mission.

From this time onwards the number of Christians began to grow, and the mud hut which had served as a church was [346] replaced by a larger brick building in 1911. The priest who was Superior of Lul at that time was Father Banholzer, who was noted for his extensive knowledge of the Shilluk language and tribal customs and the untiring zeal with which he worked among the native people, so that many Shilluk remember him still as the 'Great Father'. One day in 1914 he shot a hippopotamus and was out in the sun for several hours dividing the meat, as a result of which he had an attack of sunstroke. He went to Kodok to be treated by the doctor, but died there in the arms of a native, and the first intimation of his death which his fellow priests at Lul received was the arrival of his body carried by natives in a boat.

A successor of Father Banholzer was Father Kohnen, who [114] wrote a Shilluk grammar and translated the New Testament and a Bible History into that language.

Another well-remembered figure is that of Mother Adal- 797*
gesa who died in 1946 while still in the prime of life. She had
been Mother Provincial in this mission for eight years after
serving in Uganda for twelve. Her death was brought about
by the long hours she spent in the sun treating those who
sent for her aid during the epidemic of relapsing fever. She [164]
saved many lives and drew many souls to God by her self-
sacrificing charity. She died in hospital in Malakal, thanking
God that she was able to die in the mission and not in far-off
Khartoum. 'It is only right,' she said, 'that I should die here
among the Shilluk, since I have given my life for them.'
When her body was brought to Lul for burial, the church
was crowded with weeping people.

In 1929 the present convent was built, and later the [346]
Fathers' house was rebuilt and a school with five classrooms
erected.

Other stations than Lul were gradually established as the work among the Shilluk was extended. In 1904 a mission was opened at Tonga, the site originally given by the king. Father Beduschi was the first Superior, but success was very slow, and after ten years or so he went to work in Uganda. It was not until 1923 that a third mission was established, this time near the village of Detwok, from which it takes its name. The funds for its foundation came from a group of Milanese Catholics who wished to assist a mission in Central Africa, preferably among the Shilluk people. Father Beduschi was recalled to become the first Superior of the new foundation; he was well fitted for it, being well acquainted with the language and customs of the people, but having seen the difference between the people in Uganda and the Shilluk he returned to the scene of his former labours very unwillingly and with
great misgivings. On his very last day in Tonga a spear had 797*
been thrown at him in an attempt on his life. He went with 798
Father Brambilla and a laybrother, Brother Joshua, who
had helped him in the foundation of Tonga and had been
there since 1904; their first task was to build huts to serve as
house, church and school. The same hostility on the part of
the natives met them as it had in Lul and Tonga, and

* 797 Father Beduschi wrote that the site of the new mission was [798] unhealthy, and that it had no resources, unless clouds of mosquitoes and flies and armies of white ants could be called resources. As soon as the rains had ended, the new arrivals [312] dug two wells for water, to the amazement of the natives, [177] who could not understand the need for a well when the river was only half a mile away, and who refused to drink the water from the wells, thinking it was bewitched. Father Beduschi managed to gather a few boys together and start a school, but his work was undone by the chiefs, witch doctors, and old people who came and took the children away by force. In other ways, too, ill-luck dogged the new foundation: the few crops they had succeeded in planting in the poor soil failed; the road they had made from the mission to the river was nearly all carried away by floods; a bridge they had built was burned; a great pile of grass gathered for roofing the huts was destroyed by fire.

Father Beduschi had hoped to obtain catechists from Uganda, but when this was found impossible he borrowed some from Lul and sent them into the surrounding villages. He wrote also to the Mother General of the Verona Missionary Sisters asking her to send some Sisters to work in the mission as a present for the Silver Jubilee of his ordination and his coming to Africa. 'Detwok,' he wrote, 'is made up of thorns and crosses; I cannot promise the good Sisters anything but work and trouble; I even promise them disappointments and not consolations, but I do promise them a missionary life, and what more do they desire?' He did not live to see the Sisters arrive, for on November 10th, 1924, he [164] died of blackwater fever, offering his life for the salvation of the Shilluk people. When he was dying, his companion, Father Brambilla, offered up to two shillings for a bottle of milk to give him, but the neighbouring villagers refused to let him have it.

Brother Joshua who was with him both at Tonga and [164] again at the Detwok mission died eventually as a leper. In Tonga he had made friends with a leper in an effort to

convert him. In Detwok he acted as cook, and one day the 797 *
native boy who helped him came to Father Beduschi and 164
said that Brother must have leprosy because he picked up
very hot things without feeling anything. It was true, and
the Brother lived the rest of his saintly life in a leper colony,
which he called his parish.

In 1925 the Sisters arrived from Lul to take possession of
the huts which had been built for them. Matters progressed
slowly, but the years 1931 and 1932 seemed to see an
awakening of interest among the Shilluk in matters of
religion. This did not last, but the missionaries found it
necessary to build a new church as the original mud building
was not large enough for the congregation. They taught 177
the natives how to make bricks and cement and how to 339
build.

During the making of the bricks for this church an accident
occurred which nearly resulted in the closing of the
mission. On April 1st, 1931, some youths and girls were
carrying bricks out of the kiln, singing and pushing one
another as they worked. Suddenly the whole pile collapsed,
burying three girls and two boys. Some women who were
going for water gave the alarm and soon the compound was
full of frantic natives all shouting agreement with the chief
who said: 'You see what happens when you allow your
children to work for the foreigners.' They ran shrieking when
a Father or Sister managed to extricate one of the victims,
but none of them would help to carry out the dying children.
The three girls died immediately and one of the boys a week 761
later. Papiti, the king, was soon on the spot and held a 643
conference with his chiefs, all but two of whom were clamouring 797 *
for the expulsion of the missionaries. The king listened to
their speeches and then rose to speak himself. 'Is not this a
thing permitted by God?' he asked. 'Did the foreigners do
it deliberately? If a crocodile takes one of our young men,
on whom do we take revenge? Is this not an accident, too?
Have not the foreigners helped us often? Who take care of
our sick? Is not this permitted by God?' The chiefs rose: 643
'You have spoken well,' they said, 'let us go.' The mission 797 *

* 797 643 was saved. Of the two chiefs who were on the side of the missionaries one is now the father of the best Catholics and catechists in Detwok, and it is pleasant to recall that King Papiti received the grace of Baptism before he died, as has already been related.

Father Brambilla, who was Superior at Lul at the time, hastened to Detwok when he heard the sad news and offered to give to the family of each of the dead girls ten cows, the amount of dowry which each would have had on marrying, but the king would not hear of it, giving as his reason: 'The crocodile does not give cows; this was an accident.' Soon afterwards the people assembled for the solemn mourning dance for the dead children, and Father Brambilla sent four bulls for the funeral feast.

* 797 The church was completed in the same year by Father Cotta, and under his guidance the school also made great progress. It was his dream to have a Central School there for the whole Shilluk mission to which boys would come from Lul and Tonga to attend the upper classes, but this scheme was not realized whilst he was there.

The mission of Kodok, as it was known, was raised to the status of an Apostolic Prefecture in 1938 and the Fathers of St. Joseph's Society of Mill Hill took over the staffing of the district from the Verona Fathers who had worked there for nearly forty years. The first leader was Mgr. Wall, who had already seen many years of service in Kenya. He had his headquarters at Malakal, another mission in Shilluk territory, and the Prefecture was renamed after this place in 1949. Since the coming of the Mill Hill Fathers the good work has gone on slowly, but the difficulties still remain immense; a total absence of civilization, complete indifference to religion on the part of the population in general, trying climatic conditions and wretched communications make the missionary's task hard and call for great patience and a spirit of optimistic endurance. Much effort [871] has been put into the advancement of education. Father Cotta's dream of a Central School in Detwok has been realized, and schools for both boys and girls as well as

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

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Teacher Training Centres have been established in other missions. New stations have been started in Awechi, Wau and Riang Nom.

Mgr. Wall had to relinquish his office of Prefect in 1947 owing to failing health, and was succeeded by Mgr. John Hart.

CHAPTER XI

IS ANYONE SICK AMONG YOU?

*797 A MISSIONARY priest working among the Shilluk will have trials, exasperations and disappointments in plenty, and being but human may gloomily wonder whether the paucity or perhaps the complete lack of results makes further efforts among such a graceless and utterly ungrateful people, in so miserable and inhospitable a terrain, really worth while, or whether it would not be better to transfer himself and his undoubted talents to a more salubrious clime and a more appreciative flock. Yes, there is no doubt about it, he is simply wasted where he is, and would do very much better in Kenya or Uganda, for instance, or the Congo, where converts are simply pouring in in their thousands, where there are decent roads and means of transport and a missionary trek means a satisfying tour by motor bike, lasting three or four weeks, and not just a bone-jolting bike ride to Kodok and back.

Thus he muses, and comes to the conclusion that he is undoubtedly right, and that he had better write to the Prefect by the next boat and break the news gently that he feels that he and his gifts are being wasted in this sterile land, and therefore will the Prefect please arrange with the authorities at home for his transfer to another and more congenial sphere of labour. Of course the letter is never written, much less sent (if it were it would probably be greeted with the hoots of derisive laughter that it deserved), for the mood rarely extends beyond the after-lunch pipe, and should it resist even that mellowing influence, it is effectively squelched by the next sick call. For there is nothing like a sick call, not even perhaps the celebration of Holy Mass, to make the priest see things in their true perspective; to make him realize the value of his presence in this particular place at this particular time, and his worth, 797* not as a teacher, or an eloquent preacher, or a clever theologian, or even as a zealous missionary whose ardour is being continually damped by the lack of response to his best efforts, but simply as a man in whom God has vested great powers in order that He may use him as the instrument for the salvation of some obscure native dying in a dismal hut in a small unknown village on the bank of the Nile.

Sickness and death do not study the convenience of the missionary either as to time or place, so he must be prepared to go at any time to any place that it is humanly possible to reach, whatever be the risk or inconvenience to himself; and although not usually fraught with peril, sick calls do have the habit of coming in at the most awkward times and from the most inaccessible of places. It may happen that the priest is alone in the mission and is perhaps in the middle of morning school when the summons comes from a village maybe ten or fifteen miles away. A catechist has come across 163 a man, baptized many years ago in Detwok, but long 797* since drifted from the district, who is sick and dying in a remote village on the other side of Kodok, and now sends in a messenger to inform the priest. Or, as often happens, the mission hears of it only because the pagan relatives of the dying man have sent in, not to summon assistance, but merely to beg a cloth to use as a shroud for his burial. Whatever way the news has come in, the priest acts promptly; 797* he hurriedly hands over his class to the Sister next door, or gives it sufficient work to keep it busy—if not happy—for the remainder of the morning. From the house he picks up his sick-call case, hurries to the chapel for the Blessed Sacrament and, if the state of the roads permits, is away on his bicycle in a matter of minutes. If the rains are on and cycling is impossible, he changes his shoes and stockings for a pair of rubber pumps and sets out across the fields and through the swamps in the general direction of the main road and Kodok.

He arrives at that important administrative and commer- [632] cial centre (the Assistant District Commissioner's residence [648] and office, a prison, a dispensary and half a dozen Arab-

*797 [632] [648] shops) in about an hour if he is on his bicycle, but if he is on foot he will be two-and-a-half to three hours on the road. He looks around for the catechist and eventually finds him on the outside of the prison fence, chatting through the wire to some of his friends on the other side who have had the misfortune to be found out. The catechist jumps up when he sees the priest approaching and hurries to meet him and assure him that the man is still alive and very anxious to see him. He tells him that the village is but a short distance away (actually it turns out to be the best part of four miles through the forest behind Kodok), and proceeds to conduct him thither through a labyrinth of paths and tracks.

Eventually they arrive at the village, a huddle of half-a-dozen miserable huts, and cross to the one where the sick man is lying. Several mangy pi-dogs drowsing in the sun rouse up at the entrance of the stranger and make their usual attack. The priest crawls through the narrow entrance [342] into the hut and coming from dazzling sunlight into semi-darkness, for there are no windows in the hut and the grass mat that was removed from the door to give him entrance has been replaced, it takes him some time to accustom himself to his surroundings. He tells someone squatting near the entrance to remove the mat from the door, since besides the lack of light there is also a decided lack of air, and the temperature, high enough outside, is well nigh unbearable inside. Furthermore there is a haze of smoke from a long [276] [515] Shilluk pipe which is being handed round the visitors to the sick bed, and an unbelievable stench arising from foul tobacco, decaying fish and unwashed, oiled and ash-smeared Shilluk bodies.

The first thing the priest does is to clear the place of its occupants—including the fish. He is relieved to find that the young woman suckling a baby is not the sick man's wife; indeed he has not got a wife, so that is one complication the less, anyway. Then, soaked with perspiration and blinded by the drops that run down into his eyes, he turns to the 763 motionless bundle of rags lying on a skin on the floor. The *797 man is conscious and evidently glad that the priest has come.

With a little help from the priest and a great deal left to the 763
compassionate understanding of God, he makes his confession 797 *
and receives his first absolution for years. Then the priest unbuttons the pocket of his shirt and takes from it a leather case, containing a gold box, that he has been carrying suspended by a cord round his neck. There is no table with spotless white cloth, crucifix, lighted candles and flowers, nothing but the bare earth floor: so he places a small corporal on the crown of his sun helmet and reverently lays the pyx down on it. The catechist who returned after the man had made his confession raises him up while the priest gives him Holy Viaticum. Then the priest goes on to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, but first he must find a clean spot on each limb that he can anoint, so he wipes the grimy hands and feet with a piece of cotton wool soaked in water. With his thumb smeared with the holy oil he proceeds with the anointing: 'By this holy anointing and of His own most tender mercy, may the Lord forgive thee the sins thou hast committed . . .' he murmurs, as in turn he makes the sign of the Cross on eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands and feet. The sick man has already drifted into unconsciousness and only the faint breathing and an occasional twitch of his hand show that he is still alive, and it is obvious that the end cannot be long delayed. The anointing finished, the priest carefully cleanses his thumb with a piece of cotton wool, and burns it, together with the wool that he used during the anointing. There remains now but one more thing, the Apostolic Blessing. This is quickly given and then he closes his sweat-stained ritual and slips it, together with his stole, into his bag, and at last is free to quit that stifling atmosphere for the comparative coolness outside. The pagans grouped outside the hut eye him curiously as he stands for the moment dazzled by the sun, but offer no comment save that one opportunist seizes the chance to try and beg a piastre, and failing that, a pipeful of tobacco. The priest wipes his streaming face with his now grimy handkerchief and, bidding the little group farewell, makes his way out of the village, accompanied as usual by

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[facing p. 116]

Photo: Fr. F. [illegible]

Sisters' Convent, Detwok. Sister gives catechism class

763 the snarling dogs. He and the catechist have not gone far on
* 797 their way towards Kodok, when the shrill wailing of women breaks out in the village they have just left; the man has died. The priest stops for a moment and commends the departed soul to God and then continues on his road.

* 797 In Kodok he meets with a disappointment. It is two p.m. and he had hoped to find his friend the Assistant District Commissioner at home, but he is out on trek in his district and so all hopes of a refreshing wash, followed by a still more refreshing bottle of cold beer and lunch, vanish. He stops for a while and rests in the shade outside the shop of one of the merchants, and is offered and gratefully accepts a glass of tepid, sickly sweet lemonade. At last, with a sigh, he throws away his cigarette and reluctantly pulls himself to his feet, to cover the ten miles that lie between him and a bath, a meal and a luxurious stretch in a deck chair.

Not all sick calls have the same happy ending as that just described. Sometimes the priest makes a long and tiring journey to find that the person he has come to see was suffering from an imaginary sickness, or else has made a miraculous recovery and has gone off to put in some work in his field, or for a day's fishing. Sometimes, alas! he arrives too late, and finds only a newly-made grave.

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* 797
[164] On one occasion I had been wandering through some villages in the evening and made a last call, just at sunset, at Pabiu. Here by chance I found a youth, shrunken and wasted by tuberculosis and obviously ill beyond recovery. He had been sick, I was told, for the past six months and had recently been brought from a village inland where he had been living for the past several years, in order that he might die in his own village. He was not a Christian, but had been a pupil at the mission school some years previously, and he still remembered some of his catechism, and asked to be baptized. Since he was quite cheerful and lively in spite of his illness, there did not seem to be any immediate danger of death so I promised that I would return the following evening to instruct and baptise him. He assented cheerfully,

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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Photo: Fr. F. [illegible]

Sister Infirmarian gives an injection at Detwok

[facing p117]

and so we parted. The next evening, after tea, I mounted 763
my bicycle and pedalled leisurely towards the village. 797*
Half-way there I met the father of one of the school boys, and we chatted for a few minutes about the progress, or rather lack of progress, his son was making. Then he asked me casually where I was going, and I replied just as casually that I was going to Pabiu to baptize so-and-so. 'So-and-so?' he said. 'He died half an hour ago.' I stared at him in amazement for a moment, and then, jumping on my bike, pedalled furiously to the village. It was only too true. I could hear the shrill crying of the women as I approached.
The men were digging the grave and the body, not yet cold, [764]
had been prepared for burial. Whether the lad had been 'helped' out of this world, I could not say; I baptized him conditionally, and could but commend him and his good intentions to the mercy of God. Then, sick at heart, I rode slowly back to the mission.

One does not easily associate humour with the administration of the Sacraments to a person who is dying, but sometimes there can be, in retrospect, a funny side even to these solemn and awful occasions. Mention has been made in a previous chapter of Rachael, the old blind leper woman of Pabiu. Poor Rachael was long a-dying, and weary though she must have been of this world she had hung on to life long beyond anybody's expectation. I had long since given her the last Sacraments and every day expected to hear that she had gone to heaven. One morning the Sister told me that the old woman did seem to be near her end and probably would not last the morning, so I went across to Pabiu to render her what assistance I could in her agony.
The entrance to a Shilluk hut is a round hole no more than [342]
waist high so that one wishing to enter must bend double or even go on hands and knees to do so. Furthermore, the inside of the hut is in semi-darkness, and entering from the bright sunlight it takes a moment or two to accustom oneself to the surroundings. Hence, when I ducked through the doorway, I almost pitched headlong over a shapeless bundle

763 lying right across the entrance. It was poor Rachael who
*797 had been stretched out across the threshold where anyone
entering the hut could not fail to step on or fall over her.
[521] Sitting against the wall opposite the entrance were four
ancient-looking hags who were simply passing the time
away in gossip whilst waiting for the old woman to die.
When I made my undignified entrance, one of the unlovely
quartette, Rachael's daughter, said, 'Get up, Rachael.
Here's the Father and he has brought you a burying cloth.'
Said I, 'I haven't brought a burying cloth.' Chorus from
the four beauties: 'He hasn't brought a cloth, Rachael;
don't get up.' To me, 'What have you brought?' 'I have
come to give her a blessing.' 'Oh! He's come to give you a
blessing, Rachael; don't get up.' At this point poor Rachael
dimly understood that someone had come to give her something, so she asked me to put it in her hand and not let the
others get it.

I thought that I had better get on with the good work,
and blessing the hut and Rachael with holy water, I began
to recite the Litany of the Dying. Half-way through, there
was an interruption from the daughter: '*Jal duong*'—a
[514] pause whilst she spits, across Rachael and through the
doorway; a good ten feet.

Myself: 'What?'

Daughter: '*Yi bi.*

[576] This normal Shilluk greeting often comes, not when first
meeting a person, but halfway through the conversation or
visit. I said something more than my prayers, while the four
resumed their gossip and spitting.

Daughter: '*Jal duong, Jal duong.*'

Myself: 'All ye Holy Virgins and Widows—Shut up.'

Daughter: 'O-oh! He says: "Shut up," and I was going to tell him that I went to the Sister to tell her that my mother was dying and to ask for a cloth to bury her in.'

At length, without further interruption I finished the prayers for the Dying, and gave poor Rachael one final blessing and prepared to depart. The four beldams followed me out of the hut, and the following conversation resulted:

Daughter: '*Jal duong.*' 763
Myself: 'What?' 797*
Daughter: 'When are you coming back with the cloth?'
Myself: 'I am not coming back with a cloth.'
Daughter: 'Oh! Shall I come to the mission to get it?'
Myself; 'No; I have no cloth.'
Daughter: 'Oh! Have you any tobacco?'
Myself: 'No, I have no tobacco.'
Daughter: 'Oh! Are you going now?'
Myself: 'Yes, I am going now.'
Final Chorus: 'He is going now, Rachael, and he hasn't brought a cloth to bury you in, and he hasn't any tobacco. Don't get up.'

In the same village of Pabiu was another ancient lady, 797* Amelia. Amelia had been baptized many years before the Mill Hill Fathers came to the Sudan, but she had long since given up all practice of her religion, and for some reason or other was bitterly antagonistic to the mission and all that it stood for, jeering at those Christians who did come to Mass and the Sacraments, and trying to prevent children from coming to the school. During the weeks preceding Easter we had had a round-up of the district, reminding the lazy and indifferent of the approaching Feast and of their Easter duties. The Parish Priest had visited Pabiu and had seen and chatted to Amelia. Some word cheerily spoken, or some little kindness he had shown her touched the old woman's heart and the grace of God did the rest. She promised that she would come to make her Easter duties, and she was as good as her word. I was agreeably surprised when she came to confession before Mass on Easter Sunday and later received Holy Communion. A fortnight later word came 763 that Amelia was very ill, having caught a chill which developed into pneumonia. I took the familiar path to 797* Pabiu to see her, and it was obvious at once that her hours were numbered. She had been carried out of her hut into the small compound in front and was lying in the afternoon sun, propped up against the reed palisade. To hear her

763 *797 confession was an easy task now, and I gave her Holy Viaticum and then proceeded to anoint her. As I did so she stirred feebly, tried to raise herself up and twisted her shoulder towards me. 'Father,' she said 'put some there. That's where the pain is.'

*797 [731] [164] Epidemics sometimes visit the district and then the missionary is very busy indeed. Devastating though they may be, carrying off both young and old, the strong as well as the weak, they can have a chastening effect on the lazy, indifferent and careless. On one occasion I stood in the dark behind a hut, whilst mosquitoes in their thousands whined and buzzed and bit, hearing a panic-stricken man's confession. Within the hut, his wife, his little daughter and infant son, all newly baptized, lay dying. The sickness had not touched him, but its visitation to his home did what years of coaxing, prodding and reminding had failed to do.

164 744 A primitive people like the Shilluk fall an easy prey to whatever sickness is going. Not overclean in their persons and insanitary in their habits, they huddle together at night in small windowless huts with the doorway blocked by a heavy grass mat; hence disease quickly spreads from person to person, from hut to hut and from village to village. Medical facilities are limited and an epidemic can get a good hold before effective reinforcements can be sent from Malakal, sixty miles away, to help the overworked Medical Assistant. During my first years at Detwok, cerebro-spinal meningitis was a regular annual visitor. It came when the rains ceased, and with the first showers of the next rainy season it disappeared again, but during the intervening months it did its deadly work and scarcely a day passed without some village mourning its dead. An effective remedy was found, however, in a spinal injection of the famous 'M & B' drug, and the scourge lost much of its terror. After 1942 it failed to put in its annual appearance, and to date Detwok and district has been free of it altogether, although yearly it makes its presence felt in the southern end of the province, and takes a deadly toll in other provinces in the Sudan.

In September 1944 a new sickness swept through the country. One evening I received a sick call from a village some four miles to the south of Detwok. Just as I was setting out another message came in from a village equally distant from this mission, but to the north. It so chanced that I was alone in the mission at the time so that the two calls from opposite directions put me in something of a quandary, since the rains were on and I could not use a bicycle. However, the call from the south appeared to be the more urgent of the two, so I went there and sent a catechist north to do whatever he could. When I arrived at my destination, I was appalled at what I found. It was not one person who was ill, but a dozen or so, including three in the house to which I had been called. (It was on this occasion that after I had baptized his wife and children the terrified husband asked me to hear his confession on the spot.) I found the same in the other villages nearby, and when I met my catechist that night he had a similar tale to report from the north. I immediately sent a runner to Kodok to wire the news through to Malakal, surmising that the outbreak was one of cerebro-spinal meningitis, since the symptoms seemed to be similar, though I was puzzled at its appearance during the rains. Prompt help was forthcoming from Malakal. The following day a launch brought a doctor and a team of assistants, and the outbreak was diagnosed as relapsing fever. It is a disease carried by lice. The person infected becomes ill and is very seedy for about a week; then he recovers and apparently is as well as ever, but after a short interval he is stricken down again, and unless medical assistance is at hand, death generally follows. Fortunately, medical assistance was at hand, and although, owing to the sickness becoming widespread so rapidly, many succumbed to it, very many were saved thanks to the immediate action taken by the medical authorities. 164 [797] * 164 744

The major problem was how to stamp out this plague which had originated somewhere round Kaka and advanced south with great rapidity. Squads of soldiers and public health workers were sent to the district and they toured the

164 744 villages, boiling, disinfecting or burning anything that could harbour the deadly lice. It was a long struggle, and the sickness had spread south of Lul and managed to get a hold on the Malakal side of the river before it was finally destroyed.

*797 164 744 [515] In the mission, we fought long and unceasingly, and happily, not unsuccessfully, to keep the fever at bay. Naturally in the school we had always maintained a very high standard of cleanliness. A morning bath for the children had always been enforced, their clothes had to be washed every Saturday, and classrooms and dormitories were swept and dusted daily. But we multiplied our efforts; the pupils' heads were kept shaved, and their clothes, blankets and mosquito nets were boiled. They were deprived of all beads, bracelets and trinkets—anything indeed where lice could find refuge. Stripped of their adornments for the first time, they appeared to be really naked, and they, and we, lived in a perpetual cloud of D.D.T. powder. As far as possible the villages were put out of bounds and the children's activities confined to the area between the mission and the river. Thanks to all these precautions only two boys went down with the sickness. These were promptly and rigorously isolated and, receiving immediate medical attention, both recovered.

164 Since the passing of the relapsing fever epidemic the district has been free from any serious outbreak of sickness. Every year, however, from November to March, when the really cold North wind comes howling across the country, many people, particularly among the old folk, get pneumonia, and the priest is ever on the alert for the knock on *[797] his door and the summons which may take him but ten minutes to answer, or on the other hand may mean a journey of twenty miles or more, and occupy him the best part of the day.

Chapter XII

GOZINTAS AND ALL THAT

A visitor to Detwok, or indeed to any other mission 797*
station, taking an after-breakfast stroll round the place, 872
would perhaps be momentarily mystified by a buzz which, as one approached nearer the source, would develop into a chant of youthful voices. Even though the listener knew nothing of the Shilluk tongue, the chant nevertheless would soon be recognized without much difficulty, for I suppose that about the same hour each morning the same chorus arises from millions of young voices all the world over. The language might differ from place to place, but the chorus is the same and the theme is the same: 'Two gozinta four twice, two gozinta six three times, two gozinta eight four times, etc., etc.' The Shilluk version is a little more elaborate [803]
than its English counterpart, for it may be translated thus: 'Four, its inside has two multiplied by two . . . ten with two to its head (i.e. twelve), its inside has two multiplied by six,' and—if one wished to proceed thus far—'one hundred with forty to its head, with four to its head, its inside has ten with two to its head multiplied by ten with two to its head.'

No matter how zealous a missionary may be to preach the 797*
Gospel, he realizes that evangelization must needs go hand 871
in hand with secular education, and indeed in some cases—and this is particularly true of the Shilluk people—must follow it. For the adult Shilluk is so conservative in his habits and customs, is so imbued in the mythology of his tribe which claims its founder to be a demi-god and the spirit of divinity to be immanent in its kings, as to be almost wholly indifferent to the presence of the foreigner in his midst, and quite incurious as to the reason of his coming. Hence, the Catholic priest among the Shilluk, although by no means unmindful of the salvation of the adult pagan,

*797 must of necessity concentrate the greater part of his efforts
871 on the youth of the tribe through the medium of the school.
Here the teaching of the 'three Rs' is combined with a solid
grounding in the Catechism, and at the end of the boy's
third year, if he has proved a satisfactory pupil and desires
to become a Christian, he is baptized. A further year in the
[872] mission Elementary School is followed by four years Inter-
mediate education. At the end of this period the boy may,
873 if of sufficient ability, pass on to the Secondary School, and
may ultimately attain to the highest honours of University
College, Khartoum. Alternatively, when his Intermediate or
464 Secondary course is finished, the pupil, either of his own
choice, or because further promotion is denied him, may
elect to seek employment, usually in one of the Government
[874] departments, or to proceed to a course of training as an
Elementary or Primary School teacher.

*797 In any case the priest is always at hand to guide, guard and
instruct him. In the mission school, naturally, he lives in a
872 Catholic community and atmosphere. If he is transferred to
a Government School, he finds a Catholic chaplain in residence who will continue his religious education, say Mass for him daily, give him the Sacraments and act as his mentor and guide in general. Our hope is that, with all these measures and safeguards, the Shilluk boy, now fast approaching manhood, with eight or ten years' schooling behind him, his character strengthened and firmly set in Catholic practices, will bring a Catholic influence into his tribe, will marry a Catholic wife and found a Catholic family, and so will prove a corner-stone in the building up of Christianity in the tribe during the next generation.

This is the reason why I, in common with the majority of newly-arrived missionaries, was set to serve my apprenticeship in the school. Two days after my arrival at Detwok, I was firmly though not unkindly conducted to a classroom, confronted by two rows of husky youths and told, 'This is Class IV; go ahead and teach them.' Left to my fate, I gave the class what I fondly hoped was a friendly grin but which was probably a sickly leer, and the pupils responded with a

teeth-baring snarl. Then I bade them a cheery 'Good- 797*
morning', and was greeted in turn by a full-throated roar. 872
These preliminaries over, I cast wildly round for something to teach. English! That's what I'll start with; English by the direct method. And heaven knows, never before had a class so unique an opportunity of learning by the direct method; I knew no Shilluk, and it had no English. The setting was perfect. I picked up a book from the table and said 'BOOK'. The boys beamed brightly as though I had performed a smart conjuring trick. I repeated the word and indicated that they were allowed to play too, and was rewarded by a thundered response of 'FOOL'. I showed them a tin box, saying 'TIN'. The answering bellow was 'SIN'. 'TABLE' was rendered as 'ALEFUL' (which I wasn't at that hour of the morning). 'RULER—BOO', 'CHAIR—JEER', 'PEN—FEN', 'PENCIL—FANCY'. And so the merry game went on. When I said 'Stand up', the response sounded like a request from a gangster accompanied by a menacing gesture with a tommy gun.

When at length I had exhausted all the articles in the room, my vocabulary, and myself, I selected the book from the now littered table and asked the brightest looking star in the galaxy what it was. He promptly answered 'Fool'. I tried another boy and he thought it was a 'Fancy'. I waggled the book at a third and he gave his considered opinion that it was a 'Jeer'. 'No, you clown,' I shrieked, 'it's a Book, a BOOK, a BOO—OOOK'. 'Now'—to the whole class—'what is it?' The troupe, game to the last, bayed something that ranged between 'Fool' and 'Coot'. I threw the book at them and fled.

It is interesting after the lapse of a dozen years to see what 797*
became of the 'guinea pigs' of that first 'Essay in Elemen- 159
ary English'. Simon is now a respected and happily married [872]
Primary teacher in Detwok Central School; Maurice teaches in Lul Elementary School; Bernard, after serving Detwok mission faithfully for years, inherited a dead relative's wife, and now we see him no more. One boy died and two have dropped out of my ken. Two others took full

*797 advantage of the superiority that the mission education
159 gave them over their fellows, for one became a doctor; not, alas! one of the medical variety, but a witch doctor, and the other, rejoicing in his knowledge of writing and arithmetic, tried to forge a paysheet, and now languishes in Malakal Gaol.

*797 To the Shilluk, the foreigner and all his works were of little
185 or no interest, unless he could see some immediate personal benefit to himself. The missionary was a person whom he hoped to touch for a piastre or a pipeful of tobacco; the mission was a place where those good, but queer, women,
[759] the Sisters ('*Thwore*'—an attempt at the Italian '*Suore*'—as he called them), could be relied upon to produce a remedy for his tummyache, a bandage for his sores and a soothing medicine for his rheumy eyes. So, too, education meant nothing to him. The mission school did not mean a place
872 where his children could learn to read and write, but rather
*797 a convenient nursery and boarding house where offspring
857 could be dumped during the periods when food was short in the village, and in the rainy season when parents were busy about the all-important business of planting and were only too glad to have their infants out of the way and from under their feet. They knew that in the mission the child would be well fed and housed, would even be given a yard or so of white cloth to wear and a blanket in which to roll himself at night. And when the rains were over and the grain baskets once more full, he could promptly be recalled to the family hearth, to attend to the domestic chores of minding the baby or tending the herd of goats and sheep.

The boys, too, who did condescend to attend the school, were for the most part not particularly worried about their academic advancement. They came because it was a novelty for them; it was a change from the life of the cattle camp and the village; from the milking of cows and the herding of goats and the nursing of squalling babies. They came also because of the amenities the status of a scholar offered to
[262] them; the resplendent white cloth with which to cover their

dusty nakedness; the good red blankets to protect them from 797*
the cold at night; the two solid meals a day in which oil and 872
salt were always to be found, and frequently meat and 857
groundnuts as well, and the joys and thrills of football. For [262]
these and other blessings the Shilluk boy was quite willing to put up with the nuisance of having to sit in a classroom for a few hours each morning, with the grind of gozintas and the making of ridiculous marks on a slate. After all, he needn't learn these things if he didn't want to; when the novelty of the place wore off, and even the delights of football began to cloy, he could always run away and return to the freedom of the pampas and the cattle camp, and if he had any luck he might be able to get away with his cloth and his blanket too. And, by heaven, they did run away, with a regularity that became monotonous. I suppose that during the first couple of years, for every boy who found learning to his liking and settled down to make it his career, ten tired after a month or two and returned to the less exacting life of the kraal and the cattle camp.

Sometimes it would suddenly dawn on a Shilluk parent that he hadn't seen his son and heir about the place for the past week or two, and that his herd was either tended by a substitute, or else running wild to the detriment of his neighbours' corn fields, and with a baleful light in his eye and a willowy stick in his hand, he would make a bee-line for the
mission. Or perhaps he would be returning from the river 797*
and would stand stock still and rub his eyes in astonished 872
incredulity on beholding the vision of the apple of his eye clad in spotless white, his face shining with soap and his soul with virtue, among the alumni of Detwok Academy. Disturbed in whatever I was doing by the ear-piercing shrieks that one usually associates with pig killing, I would rush to the spot. But the result was always the same; the white badge of scholarship would be whipped off the boy and flung indignantly in my direction; the erring youth, after dodging round a few obstacles to avoid the shrewd cuts of the ashplant, would break for the open and hare it in the general direction of French Equatorial Africa, his irate dad

*797 872 a good second, getting in a telling thwack every second or third step. I could but watch with dismay until the yells grew fainter as pursued and pursuer grew smaller in the distance, and then resignedly cross the name of yet another promising scholar from the roll.

So with one thing and another Detwok Elementary Vernacular School had something of a floating population during the first two years. In January 1940 there were some twenty pupils in Class I. When I closed the school in November there were still some twenty pupils in Class I, but alas! they were not the same twenty. There had been many incomings and outgoings during the intervening months, so that the personnel of the class, although always hovering around the twenty mark, had completely changed not once only but several times, and of the original twenty not one had stayed the course. On going across to the school on any given morning, I could never know whether I would find thirty pupils or thirteen or even three. On one historic occasion, indeed, I found none! There had been a communal fishing effort on the previous day resulting in a bumper catch. And overnight, the entire student body had hied it to the villages, nor did any of the truants return while there remained a bone to be picked clean.

Gradually, however, things improved. I was able to take a firmer hand and in 1942 let it be known far and wide that I would refuse all comers after the end of February (the school re-opened at the beginning of January), and that all who left would be refused re-admittance. In May and June, when the grain bins were emptying and the first rains were falling, the usual stream of applicants athirst for academic honours began. Steeling my heart, I refused one and all. The Shilluk were incredulous and indignant. 'Where,' they demanded, 'are we to find food for the children at this time of the year?' I regretted that I did not know, but assured them that it would not be from the school larder; I pointed out that if they had made less beer during the months of plenty, they would have sufficient now for themselves and their progeny, and bade them a courteous good-day. Those

in the school, knowing that re-entrance was barred to them 797 *
if they ran away, and sensing what the coldness of their 872
reception at the family dinner table would be if they returned
at such a time, elected to stay, and found that actually
gozintas and all that could be fun. They remained for that
year and came back for more the following year. Numbers
grew year by year until the happy day in mid-January 1946
when I had to turn applicants away through lack of room.

At the time of writing the Shilluk have become far more [185]
education-conscious, and all our schools can now be filled
without any difficulty. Indeed the problem has now become
that of finding sufficient room and teachers for all who apply.
Even girls are coming forward in increasing numbers. The [562]
reader may have noticed that so far there has been mention
only of boys. In 1940, girl education was but an idle dream.
Now each mission has its separate girls' school in the care of
the Sisters, and so the prospects for the future Christianizing of the Shilluk are thereby considerably enhanced.

CHAPTER XIII

BUILDING

*797 NOT one of the least headaches of a priest working in the foreign mission is the provision of the buildings he needs for his work. It is the great desire of every priest, of course, to have a church as beautiful and seemly as he can; in addition, he must for health's sake provide himself and the Sisters who may be working in the mission with him with well-built houses; there are also school buildings, teachers' houses and perhaps a hospital or dispensary to be constructed. There are no architects to be called on for plans, no contractors to be engaged to do the work; out of very slender resources, and with whatever ingenuity he can summon to his task, he has to do his best with what lies to his hand. I will try to describe to you, then, a session of building as it is conducted in one of our Sudan missions.

During the rainy season, as can be expected, nothing in the building line is possible, but with the end of the rains the mission begins to move with a little more liveliness than it has been able to do during the previous few months; to scrape the clogging masses of mud from its boots, to hang its waterlogged garments out to dry. Indeed if all goes well the place in a very short time will be a bustling hive of industry. For with the assurance that the last shower has fallen, the missionary begins to put into action the plans that have been maturing during the previous months. The school is expanding and new classrooms must be built; more huts must go up to accommodate the increasing number of scholars; he is getting a new teacher and must provide him with a house. Furthermore, he has noted with grave concern the dilapidated state to which many of the present buildings have been reduced. To build on cotton soil, lay the foundations as deep and as wide as you will, is as thankless and as

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unsatisfying a task as to build on sand. With no solid and 797*
permanent base on which to rest, a building after two or 346
three rainy seasons begins to move and sink, and so the missionary ruefully surveys the ominous cracks that have already appeared in the walls of school buildings that only two years ago were his pride and joy. Windows and doors have warped and white ants have already wrought havoc in [136]
the woodwork. All the mud buildings need to be replastered without and limewashed within and the thatched roofs of many of them must be renewed. The Sisters' convent is in a bad way, although they, good souls, never complain; however, if something is not done about the back wall this year, it may be that they will be past complaining. And the church, too; but that is really beyond repair. It should be pulled down and rebuilt, but when and how, and who is expert enough to do it, and what he is going to use for money to pay for it, the missionary has not the slightest idea. In the meantime he hopes devoutly that the pictures on the walls will continue to hold the cracks together for another year or two.

The immediate task, however, is brickmaking. He must 797*
try to get a hundred thousand bricks made this year so that 339
he will be able to satisfy his present requirements and leave a margin for further operations next year. Well, one thing about the Upper Nile is that it provides him with plenty of material for making bricks, namely, mud. Still, the stuff has to be dug and puddled and moulded into the right shape and size and then built into a kiln and fired. So the word 464
goes forth among the Shilluk that there is a job of work to 797*
be done up at the mission and that applications for appointments as soil diggers, water carriers, sand carriers, mud puddlers and brickmakers and, later on, as kiln builders, furnace tenders, brick carriers, pole fetchers, roof makers, grass carriers and thatchers, will be given every consideration. The invitations, I say, go out, but the Shilluk as a rule 461
is in no hurry to come in. And if his crop of grain has been 797*
good, he probably won't respond at all. What does that crazy white man up at the mission think that he, the Shilluk, is?

*797 461 Hasn't he been working for the past four months or so planting and weeding and reaping? Hasn't he got enough food now, that eked out with a little not too strenuous fishing will last him for six months or so, that is, if he can get his kids into the school again, and thus be relieved of the necessity of feeding them? And that reminds him, he must get that eldest son of his out of the school. The crop is gathered in now, so the goats can be let out to graze and the lad can mind them; it is time that he did something useful after the nice long holiday he has had up at the foreigner's place during the rains. Now it is his turn to have a holiday, and, by Nyikang, he's going to have one too; he's going to sit around and do nothing but drink beer until the rains come round again. Of course, there is that little matter of his [648] tax that the other unpleasant foreigner from Kodok will be [651] demanding soon. Of the two, he prefers the fellow at the mission; he sometimes gives him tobacco, but the only thing the one in Kodok has ever given him is three months in prison. Well, the tax is easily disposed of. His wife can sell some of the grain, or go out into the forest and collect enough firewood to sell to the Sisters in order to pay the tax. Thus pleasantly musing, he roars to a boy to fetch him his pipe, and to his wife to bring some more beer, and he sinks back against the fence of his house and relaxes gratefully in the warm sunshine.

If such is the general attitude of the Shilluk in the district, the would-be brickmaker and builder finds that his ambitious schemes have to be drastically modified. It is little use his going out, like the king's servants in the parable, into the highways and the byways to compel them to come in. Experience has taught him that if the Shilluk don't want to work they won't, and no amount of persuading will make 339 them. He manages to raise a couple of teams of brickmakers, *797 a moulder and two labourers to each team, and a few thriftless youths who have no money to pay their tax or other means of raising it drift in and are set to work to supply the brickmakers with sand and water. But he is in a sorry plight; he won't get anything like the number of

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bricks he requires and is doubtful whether those that are made will ever be built into a kiln and burnt; and, should he get over that stage, whether the bricklayers will be forthcoming to put up even the minimum number of buildings he requires. So he tears his hair and goes through his list again and reduces it building by building, until there is left not a stone standing on a stone, even on paper. The Sisters' convent, however, must be done. He will be able to find a couple of bricklayers and to scrape together sufficient labourers to do that; indeed, he must, for he dare not face the Reverend Mother and tell her that she and her Sisters must, by their prayers, hold up that tottering wall for yet another year. His school expansion programme must suffer; the present crumbling and already overcrowded buildings will have to take yet a few more, and if there are more applicants than he can fit in, then they will have to be turned away.

The missionary, dear reader, is a kindly and humane man. He earnestly desires the spiritual and material welfare of the people among whom his lot has been cast, and he works hard and long to attain that end. But he is after all but a frail mortal, and once he has experienced the frustration of a wasted dry season—wasted through no fault of his, but because of the plenty that surrounds his flock—he cannot help but wish that Providence had not yielded up the fruits of the earth so liberally, and trusts that in future years the mission building programme also may be taken into Heaven's consideration. And so other rainy seasons find him watching the weather, not in the hope, as one might expect, of seeing a lowering sky and the preparations gathering overhead for a real life-saving storm, but quite the contrary. Of course he would be appalled and would indignantly and, as he thinks, quite honestly deny it, were he taxed with harbouring such base feelings as to hope that the labours of the planting season should be, if not exactly in ruin, still, not so bountifully blessed as they might be. If it is a choice between a bumper crop and a full and busy building season, there is no doubt where his preference lies. 'Of course,' he hastily tells himself, 'he doesn't want the people to starve. What an

*797 awful thought! But can't it be arranged that they will get
just a sufficiency, and having no margin for taxes and other
such luxuries will have to come to the mission and make his
bricks and put up his buildings to get the money they need?'

461 And often enough, that is just what does happen. The
*797 rains have failed, or have been too plentiful, or fallen too
early or too late, and the Shilluk gloomily surveys his ruined
crop and looks sadly at the meagre harvest he has gathered.
That certainly won't see him very far through the year, and
[651] there is none that he can spare to sell for tax money, and if
he doesn't pay that soon, the chief will come down heavily
on him and will impound some of his sheep and goats, or—
and he reels with horror at the bare thought—one of his
[593] cows. His wife keeps nagging him for a new cloth and, as he
knows from past experience, will keep on nagging until she
gets it; an ordinary white one is not good enough for her
[291] now; she wants one of those fancy ones with flowers on, like
the teacher's wife is wearing. These women are getting
above themselves. The wild idea of selling a cow crosses his
mind, but is immediately dismissed as absurd; he would
sooner sell his wife, but anyway, the one idea is as fantastic
as the other. Having thus surveyed the whole black situation
he comes to the conclusion that has been facing him all the
time, but which he has tried to evade as being too awful; he
will have to go to work. And so, with a sigh, he bids farewell
to his beautiful dream of living in luxuriant idleness for the
next few months, and reluctantly makes his way towards the
*797 mission. The missionary, although, mind you, he is distressed
that the harvest has been a failure, and appalled at the idea
of his people being in want, positively purrs with satisfaction
when early on Monday morning he sees the crowd that
are waiting for employment. He singles out half a dozen good
339 brickmakers, assigns them their labourers and sends them
*797 off to the brickfield for the task of clearing up and preparing
the mud, as a preliminary to starting the moulding
on the morrow. Six go scurrying with water carts to fetch
water from the swamps, two to their disgust are armed with
shovels and set to work in the sand pit, there to keep the line

of sand carriers fully employed; half a dozen more, to their 339
greater disgust, are given picks and sent to dig out the 797*
foundations of the new buildings, and of the remainder some are led to the site for the new huts and put to work to clean up the ground so that the foundations can be marked out, and others given the job of making and puddling mud for the replastering of the present mud buildings.

Now commences a period of unceasing activity on the part 797*
of the missionary. There are some seventy workmen employed 466
in four different parts of the mission estate, and, 461
except for the brickmakers who are paid a set price for every [339]
thousand bricks, each and every one of them is only too [465]
ready to steal away and fold his hands and close his eyes in repose as soon as the boss's back is turned. He, poor harassed man, has become the complete Pooh-Bah of the building industry; he must act as architect, general contractor, storekeeper, clerk of works, foreman, timekeeper and cashier, and at the same time keep the mission running normally. He does not forget his priestly duties, and so he is up long before the dawn to say his Mass and have as much as possible of his Office said before he goes out at 6 a.m. to call the roll and start the men on their day's work. He returns to the house to bolt his breakfast, but before he has finished, there are half a dozen outside clamouring for attention. A wheel has come off a water cart, and the crew, never dreaming of putting it back themselves and finding a nail to hold it in place, but only too happy to have a legitimate excuse to sit down and do nothing, are doing just that. He slaps it back into place on the axle, secures it with a bolt and nut and scares the watermen into actually galloping off towards the river. A brickmaker has broken his mould and that requires a little carpentry and a few new screws. A digger complains that he can't find his shovel, is led firmly to the tool shed and falls over the missing article as he enters the doorway. A
crowd of people has gathered at the back of the house and [437]
the number is increasing as more people come from the villages carrying poles or hanks of grass rope for sale. Each pole and hank has to be inspected, its value appraised and paid for on the spot.

*797 paid for on the spot. But the Reverend Pooh-Bah leaves them
466 for the time being and goes off on the first tour of inspection.
461 He meets the sand carriers on their way from the sand pit
to the brickfield, and his suspicions are aroused by the easy
and jaunty manner in which they are carrying the baskets
which should be at least half full of sand. Examination of the
first basket reveals just a couple of inches of sand in the
[462] bottom. The rest of the girls—for the sand carriers are ladies
—don't wait to be inspected, but shrieking with laughter
scamper off back to the sand pit where he follows them and
ensures that they carry one legitimate load at least. Then
having threatened the bearers with all kinds of penalties if
they don't bring a proper load each time, he goes off to
inspect the bricks. The moulders and their assistants are
465 really putting their backs into it, for the more bricks they
339 make, the more money they will earn, and already there are
*797 long double lines of newly made bricks stretching out in
466 front of each man. In one case it is a matter of more haste,
461 less speed, for yesterday's output belonging to one man has
gaped and split in the hot sun, a sign that the mud has been
badly mixed and the puddling has been scamped. These
useless ones are rejected and the number deducted from the
culprit's total. The missionary leaves the erring team
*797 vehemently arguing the matter among themselves, since a
466 man from the hut-plastering squad comes along to tell him
461 that they are held up for lack of water, and that the water
carriers have been gone long enough to have made several
journeys. He goes back to the house to get his bicycle, and
ignoring the clamour that the pole and rope carriers set up
at his appearance, speeds down to the river. The cart is
there all right, half-way down the path, but there is no sign
of the men who are supposed to be filling the drum. He spots
one of them, almost hidden in the tall grass, engaged in
washing himself, and a splashing a little further down reveals
the presence of the other two happily employed in casting for
mud fish. In a remarkably short space of time, however, they
have the drum filled and are hastening back to the waiting
plasterers, the irate Father grimly bringing up the rear.

So he continues his tour of inspection, galvanizing the dilatory workers into fresh activity, and then returns to the house and commences the buying of the rope and roofing poles. That occupies the best part of an hour, and then, grown wise in the ways of these children of Nyikang, he makes sure that his purchases are put away, the poles on the flat roof of the house, the rope in a store-room where the wily Shilluk cannot filch them to re-sell them to him. Then it is time to make another round of the workmen, a procedure that he will carry out yet twice more during the morning and another three times during the afternoon. At 10.30 the morning's work is finished, and the labourers go home to reassemble at half-past two. There is no respite for Pooh-Bah, however. The affairs of the mission demand his attention, another group of rope sellers have gathered, the post-boat is due the next day, and he must write to Malakal for cement and to Kodok about the wood for the brick burning. He disposes of these tasks and also manages to find time to finish his Office before lunch. The afternoon's work is a repetition of the morning's; a continual tour of the different groups, the attending to the wants of one here and another one there, with one or two visits to the house to dispose of the rope and pole sellers. 797* 466 [685]

Thus one day succeeds another, and week follows week and still the work goes on. By Christmas there are fifty thousand bricks ready for burning, the foundations of the new classrooms and the teacher's house are dug, the old mud huts have been replastered and the walls of the six new ones are already well above the ground, and everybody, Pooh-Bah by no means among the least, is heartily sick of the sight of mud, whether in its natural state, or made into bricks, or built into a wall, and is only too glad of the few days' respite the Festival brings. As soon as Christmas is over, the work begins on the kiln. The base, a rectangle twenty-five feet long and fifteen feet wide, must be built with care since it has to support the weight of thirty thousand bricks. It is three feet in height and is pierced by six triangular firing tunnels, each two feet wide at the base and two feet 797* 797* 337

*797 339 high at the apex. Its construction takes two bricklayers a full fortnight, and then another week is required to build up the bricks on the foundation, six men piling row upon row on edge in a herringbone pattern that leaves plenty of space for the flames to penetrate. Thirty thousand bricks are thus built up into a solid block some nine feet high, and the whole mass is plastered with mud to seal off all the cracks in the walls.

Meanwhile, the District Commissioner, who had promised to use his good offices in procuring sufficient wood for burning the bricks, has been as good as his word, and one day a steamer arrives bringing one hundred and fifty cubic metres of firewood. It looks a small pile when dumped on the shore, but its transport to the brickfield presents a formidable problem when the only wheeled vehicle available is [493] a rickety handcart. Yet if it isn't moved soon, its transport will present no problem at all; the Shilluk will see to that. Fortunately the District Commissioner solves that difficulty too, for he arrives by lorry shortly after the wood, and kindly gives the harassed priest the loan of truck and driver to bring the wood from the river. A strenuous day's work sees the job done and the wood neatly stacked in two piles, one on each side of the kiln.

*797 466 It is now the end of January. The brickmakers are well into the second fifty thousand bricks, the walls of the six new huts are finished and the construction of the roofs is [344] well in hand. Grass rope is still required, but the number of roofing poles required is now complete and the demand now is for millet stalks. Women come in from the fields bearing huge bundles of them on their heads, and wait patiently until busy Pooh-Bah has time to attend to them. The swamps are emptying rapidly with the fall of the river and in another month the grass will be drying out ready for cutting. The work is going well and is keeping up to the time-table, but all this has not been accomplished in complete harmony and smoothness. The same relentless vigilance has to be kept up day after day to keep the indolent up to scratch; disputes break out among the workmen and often sounds of strife at

one end of the compound bring Pooh-Bah hurrying from the 797 *
other to add those of peacemaker and judge to his other 466
rôles. Workmen tire of their particular jobs (water carrying [461]
is particularly hated) and demand another one. The water-
carrying difficulty is not solved until a roster is formed so
that everyone except the lordly brickmakers and bricklayers
take their turn. Hoes begin to disappear, but that little pas- [685]
time is effectively put an end to by stopping the price out of [465]
the wages of every individual in the squad concerned. After
the second one disappears it is found to be too expensive.

Now it is time to fire the kiln. The six tunnels are roughly 797 *
bricked up on one side and filled with firewood and straw
from the other. The fires are lighted at dusk, and once they 339
are kindled must not be allowed to go out until the firing is completed. Soon each fire is blazing merrily, and the draught forcing the fire back through the mass of dry wood and straw quickly turns each tunnel into a roaring cavern of flame. The kiln presents a grand spectacle in the darkness, as great tongues of fire lick out from the openings and billows of smoke from the wood and clouds of steam from the still drying bricks envelop the whole structure. The firing continues on one side for two nights and two days; then that side is bricked up and the other side opened and the process for firing continued for a like period. The interiors of the tunnels are before long glowing white-hot masses of fused brick, and the kiln soon becomes fiercely hot as the flames mount up, searching through each crack and cranny to reach the top of the mass. When the firing is completed, the tunnels are blocked up again, any cracks that have appeared in the walls are plastered over anew and the mass is left to cool down, a process that takes about a week. By now there are sufficient bricks to commence the second kiln and this is built in the same manner as the first. But the priest has noted with concern that the firing of the kiln has consumed far more wood than he had anticipated. The strong north wind which now blows with full force every day has helped on the fires more enthusiastically than he would have liked. He cannot go to the expense of getting more wood from Kodok, and the

* 797 forest is too far away to make wood carrying from there an
339 economical proposition, so he has to fall back on what
resources the mission can offer. A squad goes off armed with
saws and axes to attack the leafy avenue of trees which line
the road to the river. The operation is euphemistically
called 'pruning', but by the time it is completed and the
Father's wood hunger is satisfied, the trees present a sad and
sorry appearance. However, they will recover, and anyhow
he can't afford to shed a sentimental tear over their appearance
with sixty thousand bricks yet at stake.

With the breaking down of the brick kiln, revealing the
rows of lovely bricks, those on the top and sides baked a
golden brown, and the centre ones red and blue, the real
work of the season begins; the rebuilding of the Sisters' convent
and the erection of the new schoolrooms and the
teacher's house. This is a task beyond the amateur capabili-
* 797 ties of our Pooh-Bah, but expert assistance is at hand. One of
the Prefecture staff is an authority on building, and he,
accompanied by a Brother, arrives on the postboat, having
been snatched from his labours in some other mission to
start the work here. Scaffolding is erected round the dangerous
wall and with consummate skill the expert directs the
operation of pulling down the wall in sections, planning to
rebuild one portion before passing on to the destruction and
rebuilding of the next. The Brother meanwhile is setting out
the foundations of the other buildings. The Reverend man-of-all-work,
however, has little time to pause and admire
such dexterity, for the unceasing daily round still claims his
attention. The second kiln is nearing completion, and must
be fired as soon as possible, and the first one, now being
rapidly demolished, has to be rebuilt with the remaining
mud bricks, about another thirty thousand, and fired again.
[437] He is still a one-man purchasing board for the produce of
the district, but now the grass rope and millet stalks have
given way to bundles of grass for thatching and the work of
[340] thatching the new huts and some of the old ones has already
started.

So far, apart from minor hitches, accidents and squabbles, everything has gone wonderfully well, but now a serious 797 * misfortune occurs. The schoolboys too have been roped in to assist in cutting and collecting some of the great quantity of grass that is required for the thatching, and as a result of their labours about three hundred and fifty heads of grass are standing in the field near the river waiting to be transported to the building sites. One bright and too breezy morning two small boys, a couple of miles north of the mission, light a small fire to cook some fish that they have caught, the north wind scatters the fire among the tall, tinder-like grass and before anyone in the mission is aware of what has happened, a great mass of fire comes sweeping and roaring down, not on the mission itself, which is not in the direct path of the flames, but on the field of cut grass and the mission garden by the river. It happens to be Good 466 Friday when the building operations have been suspended and no outside help is available. Two priests, a few mission employees and a handful of schoolboys attempt to rescue the grass and save the garden, but without success. The grass is destroyed and although the garden itself is protected by fire lines, the fierce heat so scorches the fruit trees and vegetable beds as to deprive the mission of vegetables for the next few months and of fruit for the remainder of the year. The fire is stopped only by the steep grassless bank of the path, but even so, it manages to reach out and burn several of the fine trees that line the path. One pious Sister consolingly reminds poor blackened Pooh-Bah, now turned fire-fighter, that such incidents are the 'poetry of the missionary life'. Such a mishap is not a complete disaster, however. It means that more grass must be bought from the villagers and the roofing of some of the huts will be delayed, but the rest of the work goes on as before. Not quite as before perhaps, for now it is March, and the programme is frequently interrupted by fishing days. These are the Shilluk equivalent of 466 Bank Holidays and the missionary must be resigned to one or perhaps two days a week of idleness while the fishing lasts. However, he has no cause for anxiety. The second kiln has been successfully fired and the third is nearing completion

*797 and can be burnt in a few days, one section of the convent wall has been rebuilt and the second started, the walls of the new brick buildings are rising and the thatching is going on as fast as grass can be obtained.

But yet another verse of missionary 'poetry' has to be written. The third and last kiln has been fired and during
*797 the first night and day all goes well. During the second night
339 of the firing, however, the faithless tenders of the fires desert
466 their posts to slumber and sleep during the night watches. The fires burn low and die out. In the morning the sleepers awake and try frantically to re-light the fires before their negligence is discovered and also before the kiln is spoiled. But they are too late on both counts. They are caught in the act by an angry Pooh-Bah who on his way to say Mass has noticed the lack of light and activity around the kiln. The fires are rekindled and the firing continues in the hope of saving the kiln, but the damage has been done. Most of the bricks are poor yellow specimens that crumble at a touch, and the kiln has to be written off as a loss. The unworthy servants are removed with ignominy from their stewardship. Still, despite this calamity, the work is able to
*797 go on. With the two kilns already burned and the reserve from the previous year there are sufficient bricks to complete the jobs on hand, although there is no margin left for any emergency that might arise and no reserve for the following year. By the end of April one or two warning showers have fallen just to let one know that the rains are on the way. But the programme is almost completed. The Sisters are safe and secure behind a stout new wall, the walls of the classrooms and house are up and roofs are on and doors and windows are being fitted. The thatching is done and all the huts both old and new are tight and sound to withstand whatever storms the rainy season may bring.

Pooh-Bah stretches and yawns mightily, and then turns to his sadly neglected desk. He is well satisfied with what has been achieved, and his building troubles are over for another year.

CHAPTER XIV

FAMINE AND FLOOD

IT would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the majority 731 of the Shilluk live in a state of chronic hunger. The poverty [433] of the land they till, their primitive methods of husbandry, the elements which seem to fight against them in their annual struggle to raise a crop all contribute to make this so. And if despite all these handicaps, if perhaps in an occasional year the fates relent a little and send neither deluge nor drought, but a supply of rain liberal enough to nurture a plentiful field, then the weaver birds will descend in their millions to lay [136] waste the great heads of mature but as yet unripened grain. The damage that these tiny predators can do is incredible. In the early dawn they swoop like a black cloud on the unprotected fields, settle and after a short time, rise again. But they leave behind them ruin; the heads of grain are in rags and tatters and the ground is carpeted green with the unripened grain. In three or four days the former flourishing field is laid waste.

Once, at daybreak, I saw a migration of weaver birds. They were flying up the Nile from north to south. I did not see the beginning of this great army, neither did I see the end, but for half an hour it flew in an unbroken mass which seemed to stretch across the entire breadth of the river and to be about a foot deep. Its passing boded ill for the luckless cultivators in the south.

Despite these misfortunes the Shilluk usually manage to [433] garner something from their impoverished fields. From October and for the next few months they generally have sufficient to eat and after that, if they have money to buy it, grain imported from more prosperous parts of the country is available in the merchants' stores. But occasionally the [443] whole country is stricken. The failure of the rains is

731 widespread, few have a sufficiency and fewer have any to spare for sale. Then the plight of the Shilluk is pitiful indeed.

Such a disaster occurred in 1945. The rains were sparse all over the country and failed almost entirely in the Upper Nile Province. In the Detwok area, after a promising start a prolonged drought set in and the young shoots withered and died. Hope revived when a heavy downpour of rain broke the drought and the people went out to plant again. But this second planting suffered the same fate as the first and as one scorching day followed another during the remainder of what was supposed to be the rainy season expectation slowly died, together with the wilting crops. The ruin was complete and, as we soon learned, was confined not merely to our own area or even to the Upper Nile but was general throughout the country.

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461 In Detwok we were planning to open a Central School the following year and consequently had in hand a larger building programme than usual. The famine assured us of no scarcity of labour. Usually even though the crops are meagre there is no shortage in the months immediately following the harvest, and the Shilluk, careless for the future, gives himself over to the enjoyment of the fruits of his industry. Much of his precious grain is converted into beer

[574] and he dispenses and receives lavish hospitality at the many
[595] village dances with which the Shilluk celebrates the harvest. Not unnaturally the proposal that he should spend the next few months digging foundations or brickmaking or carrying water is received with a marked lack of enthusiasm, and we usually depend for our labour upon those improvident bachelors who have not bothered about a cultivation and who moreover are faced with the necessity of raising money to pay the annual poll tax.

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466 This year, however, there was no need to be anxious about a shortage of workmen. Each Monday when the labourers were hired for the week the mission was besieged from before dawn by hundreds of men and women begging for a chance to be able to earn a few shillings. We were able to employ only a fraction of this crowd, and it was a thankless and an

unhappy task to try to choose fairly so that, if not every 731
individual, at least every village should be given a turn. It 797
was an even more difficult and unhappy task to send the [466]
disappointed ones away; to turn a deaf ear to their pleadings; to close one's eyes to the mute appeal in theirs.

But in actual fact the ones who worked were little better off than those who didn't, for although they had a little money there was no grain to buy. In view of the opening of the new school we had been forming a reserve of grain, but the scheme had to be abandoned in the face of such complete shortage. We doled out what we had and by dint of careful and stringent rationing we were able to keep about twenty families, I will not say 'fed', but at least from starvation from October until February when our store was exhausted and we could do no more.

The Government stepped in and took control of all the grain in the country in order to ensure a fair distribution. We had at that time about 120 people—schoolchildren and permanent employees—to feed every day, and normally used a 2-cwt sack of grain per day. We were allotted ten sacks per month, one third of our usual consumption, and so had to make a proportionate reduction in the food bowl. But there was no question of the Shilluk schoolboy being thankful for small mercies in receiving a little every day whilst his less fortunate parents and brothers and sisters at home got nothing. There were protest meetings among the boys generally followed by an indignant procession carrying the meagrely filled bowls so that the Father—myself—who in their eyes was responsible for this shortage could see for himself the result of his gross neglect in not cornering the entire grain supply for their benefit. In vain I pointed out that the famine was no fault of mine and that they were better off than their brethren in the village. They replied in effect that such arguments were beside the point. Since they had done me the favour of coming to the mission to be fed, clothed, housed—and incidentally taught—for nothing, the least I could do in return was to see that the feeding was adequate, and since I had so obviously failed in this respect, 731 797 they might as well go home again. And go home many of them did, regardless of the fact that whilst at the mission they would get some sort of a daily ration, there would be nothing for them at the parental board, not even a welcome.

Those who remained got a little extra in consequence of the defection of their fellows, and in order to supplement their slim diet still more I divided the school into two and on alternate days sent one half to fish for the benefit of everybody whilst the other half had class, and bought a bull each week to provide them with a couple of meat meals.

And so we struggled on from month to month until in June the importation of beans from Egypt eased matters considerably, and eventually with the arrival of the new crops in mid-September the crisis was passed.

731 The unfortunate people outside the mission did not fare so well. True, periodic allotments of grain were made at various central villages that boasted a shop or two, but it was impossible to devise an equitable system of rationing, and since many people were several miles from these centres, the possession of money did not guarantee that there would be grain left by the time they had tramped the hot and dusty road to the shop. For the most part they subsisted on roots [261] and grass and occasionally a decent catch of fish would enable them to forget their misery for a time.

We heard of many instances of suffering and endurance during these dreadful months; how a young mother alone in a hut with her newly-born baby, in trying to lift herself up to reach for a drink of water fell on the infant and killed it; how a woman in search of food walked from Detwok through the Shilluk country to Kaka some fifty miles to the north, there crossed the river and continued her quest among the equally stricken Dinka tribe, and making a huge semi-circle through rough country, eventually recrossed the Nile opposite Detwok and came home empty-handed, having covered about 150 miles on foot.

731 797 One morning when I was going across to the school I saw two little children in the Sisters' compound trying to pick out the few grains of millet seed that had fallen into the

cracks in the soil. As I approached they fled and I continued with a heavy heart across the compound. The Reverend Mother came from the house to meet me. The tears were streaming down her face as she told me that the two children had been abandoned by their parents who had gone away in search of food. Near to tears myself I told the weeping nun that I could not and would not take any more children into the school, that I could not and would not feed all the destitute children from the villages and that I could not permit her to give of our scanty ration to any of the hungry folk that daily haunted the mission. But, I hastily added, as the tears flowed faster, if she was a wicked and disobedient nun and chose when I was safely out of the way to disregard these strict orders and give a little food occasionally to two small hungry children, then of course I could not prevent her from doing so. It took her a moment to grasp my meaning, and then brightening, she dried her eyes and cheerfully promised to disobey me each morning when I was in the classroom and unable to see what was going on. And so the two children were given a meal every day while the shortage lasted and until their parents returned to provide for them. 731 797

The rains of 1946 bade fair to make amends for their sad failure of the previous year. And that the heavy downpours we experienced in Detwok were no mere local affairs was soon made evident from the rapidity with which the Nile rose. The mission is half a mile from the river and is reached by a road built some four feet above the swamp level and lined with trees by our energetic Italian predecessors. By the end of September the swamp waters had overtopped the road and had flooded it in parts to a depth of nearly a foot, and by Christmas the accepted method of going to collect mails and stores from the fortnightly steamer was to paddle the mission boat down the road until it grounded in the mud and then to wade the rest—and this generally at about 2 a.m.

During this time Mgr. Wall, the Prefect, paid one of his periodic visits to the mission. He did not travel on the ordinary fortnightly boat but by a casual northbound tug,

Moral support at Detwok Dispensary

[facing p.148]

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so that his arrival was unawaited. As usual the boat arrived at Detwok in the small hours of the morning, and after manœuvring round in the inky darkness managed to put Monsignor ashore on what was thought to be the road, but which turned out to be the garden. Since this was locked he could not get out, so the tugmaster obligingly took him on board again and then backing his craft a few yards down to where the path was, told a couple of sailors to carry Monsignor ashore and escort him up to the mission. They managed to land him without mishap on the only piece of dry land that remained—a patch about the size of a tablecloth—but after splashing a few yards through the watery waste the boatmen prudently refused to proceed further and lifted Monsignor up to carry him back to the tug. Unfortunately they dropped him in the river. However, he was quickly fished out, and spent the rest of the night in a chair, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, while his sodden garments dried out in the engine-room.

On another occasion the unfortunate Father whose duty it was to attend to whatever boats should call at the mission was aroused from his slumbers by a mournful hoot from the river which heralded the arrival of a steamer. Reluctantly dragging himself from his snug bed he went out on the verandah and to his relief saw the lights of the boat receding in the distance. He decided that either the hooter had blown in mistake or else whatever had been dumped on the bank could wait until morning. 'Whatever had been dumped on the bank' did wait until morning; it was Mgr. Wall once more, making another unexpected visit to the mission. Finding no guide coming to assist him and not daring in the dark to attempt the perilous passage of the waters alone, he was marooned and had perforce to await the coming of daylight, sitting on his suitcase and wrapped in his dressing-gown for protection against the hordes of mosquitoes that delightedly hastened to the place to keep him company during the long hours of his vigil.

When at length the river began to subside the floods receded rapidly, so rapidly indeed that they carried away a

great portion of the road and of the embankment that we 731
had repaired and built up at no inconsiderable cost and 797
labour only the previous year.

So passed our trial by famine and flood. We have been visited by both misfortunes since then but not again in successive years nor on so large and widespread a scale.

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[facing p.149]

Photo: Fr. P. Spakauskas

Right Reverend Monsignor Hart, Prefect Apostolic of Malakal (formerly Kodok) Prefecture and some of the Fathers

29: Dempsey
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[For information on missionary activities and a brief history of the mission among the Shilluk see category 116, pp. 99-142.]